

# THE BULL WHIP

*by*  
JANE ENGLAND

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A DRAMA of the South African veldt,  
its primitive, unreasoning lure for an  
English girl whose desire to conquer it was  
stronger than fear of a sadistic father, loy-  
alty to a sullen husband or passion for an  
importunate lover.

**OLD MAN BRUCE** on the "jag" again, reverting to his bull whip in moments of sadism, young Charles, crippled, sullen, proud, demanding silently her devotion in a situation which she cannot understand, Mark loving her, ready to snatch her from Charles and the wheat fields which she has forced from the reluctant soil, Davida clings to her loyalty to the earth with a passionate determination to work out some compromise with happiness on her own tilled corner of the broad veldt.

**JANE ENGLAND**, with Sarah Gertrude Millin, Pauline Smith and Ethelreda Lewis, belongs to that vivid group of young South African authors who have translated the spell of a strange land into their prose. She makes the veldt a living factor in this brilliant psychological drama.

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**BY JANE ENGLAND**

*Author of "RED EARTH"*

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*Dedicated to*  
ALL AT GREEN MEADOWS



THE BULL WHIP





## CHAPTER ONE

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OLD MAN BRUCE "on the jag" again!

Davida, jogging home through the warm afternoon, shook her head resentfully. That meant that when she got home, Alice would be in tears, Charles sulky and sardonic, and Old Man Bruce, her father-in-law, sleeping it off. Very tiresome, thought Davida, who strove after a philosophic detachment towards life.

The veldt was golden, the dry grass rustled and waved under the sun. Like riding ruthlessly through a wheat-field, thought Davida—funny feeling. And all the world hazy with heat—even the Sylvester homestead was softened and less ugly in the distance—and there was Mrs. Sylvester peering out of the veranda, and turning over her shoulder to call to someone inside to come and look at Old Man Bruce's daughter-in-law riding past. One should not be irritated by these things, one should not even be upset at hearing a strange young man say in Thorogood's store that Old Man Bruce was "on the jag" again. One should not . . . but, in spite of one's philosophic detachment, one was. Mrs. Sylvester was a cat, an untidy, silly cat . . . and the young man talked too much!

Davida dug her heels irritably into her horse's flanks and moved more rapidly away from Mrs. Sylvester's proximity.

She wished she hadn't been to the store. After all, if one didn't hear things said, one could pretend one didn't know about them, could pretend to oneself that Old Man Bruce was not the subject of conversation up and down the district, that everybody was not aware of his "jags."

Charles would be furious. When she thought of Charles, her dark brows almost met across her forehead . . . she wore a puzzled, whimsical expression. Charles was . . . well, Charles was . . . difficult. What a thing a war was! It made one marry recklessly! Really, one ought to look into people's family tree before one married them, or at least insist on seeing all their family!

Her horse shied and she gave up thinking about Charles.

She began to wonder instead whether the wheat "lands" were ploughed. She hadn't been down for some time. They ought to be nearly finished, but she had an idea that the Old Man had taken the driver and oxen for something else. Should she go down and look?

She glanced up at the sun . . . no, she'd better not. It was getting late and Alice would be wanting her. Poor Alice . . . wanting to marry Archie Mayne, and Archie's family thinking of Old Man Bruce. So stupid! As if it affected anyone else what the Old Man did. It



affected the people who had to live with him . . . if Archie had any sense he would marry Alice out of hand and take her away.

She was in the home *vlei*. It was lovely, like a park dotted with mimosa trees. It stretched away to that dark, brooding line of bush that lost itself against the blue of the sky. The Shorthorn herd was grazing there . . . it was like a big estate in England, only there were no railings round the clumps of trees.

There was Alice on the stoep, staring out, her shoulders drooping, a hand shading her eyes, looking for Archie, half-afraid he would come now that the Old Man had a "jag" on.

Davida sighed. Her brows met again over her short straight nose, and a flush came under her skin. She was very young; only twenty, and dark, with hair that fell in loose waves around her small face; her skin was usually cream-coloured, but the African sun had burnt it a pale gold colour; her wide grey eyes were full of dreams. She had a curiously aloof air, as if people and things could not really touch her. Her eyes laughed easily. . . .

Now they were thoughtful . . . Poor Alice!

## II

Alice was tearful. Her brown eyes swollen and red-rimmed; her soft lips bitten and rough from the pressing of a wet handkerchief.

She was ready to weep again at the sight of Davida; tears flooded into her eyes.

"Too bad," said Davida briefly. "I heard at the store . . . accidentally; people don't go out of their way to tell you these glad tidings . . . where's Charles?"

Alice's mouth quivered.

"He went off," she muttered, "down to the 'lands' . . . he was furious."

"Too bad," said Davida again.

She glanced round the veranda. The two basket-chairs were overturned and bits of broken glass winked and glittered in the sunlight. A hat, evidently flung from one side to the other, lay dented and dusty against the wall.

She shrugged her shoulders and picked up one of the chairs, then, thoughtfully, the other. She looked at the broken glass and made a face.

Everything was very quiet, drowsily quiet.

Except for an occasional half-sob from Alice, there was no sound——

"I'm not going to pick up the glass," said Davida dreamily, "the 'boy' can do it."

"It's a shame," said Alice chokingly, "even the 'boys' know. . . ."

"Oh," said Davida, "anyone might have broken a glass and I've picked up the chairs."

"Go and look at the sitting-room," retorted Alice, "and . . . and Archie is coming this afternoon. . . ."

Suddenly, her feelings overcoming her with a fresh

burst of tears, she rushed out of the veranda into her bedroom.

Davida went and looked at the sitting-room. It was completely wrecked. Even the pictures were smashed. Apparently it had been done with a chair leg that lay in a corner. A brown stain across the wall bore witness to the fact that the teapot had been thrown at it, and cups and saucers had been smashed and ground under-foot into a mess of crockery, cake, and bread and butter. A riding-boot leant drunkenly against the wall. The foot of another stuck up over the end of the sofa, where the Old Man had collapsed. His long white hair was wild and fell across his face; the white beard that gave him such an expression of culture and saintliness was tangled and stained. He breathed stertorously.

Davida walked out of the room. There was something indecent in even seeing him.

On the veranda she lit a cigarette. Her eyes were full of cold anger. She was more angry with Charles than with his father. One took these things for granted with the Old Man—apparently he could not help it. But what right had Charles to go off and leave Alice to it? Someone had to clear the room up, and he detested the “boy” doing it. Said it let them all down for the “boy” to see it. So it did. . . . In that case Charles should have stayed and got it straight himself. She supposed he was in one of his sullen, unreasonable moods. But . . . did he expect her, or Alice, to do it? He could hardly expect them to lift up his father and carry him to bed. . . .

Archie might turn up any minute. . . .

What a long way away England was . . . how safe and sane . . . full of policemen and telephones!

With a little shrug of her shoulders and lifted eyebrows, she went through to the back of the house.

The kitchen was outside the house. A small white-washed hut where a piccanin sat scouring a saucepan with sand, and the houseboy, Mac, pretending to be unaware of the afternoon's happenings, was ironing his white jacket.

She was just going to send him to look for Charles, when Charles rode up from the "lands." He had taken off his hat and his fair hair was golden in the glow of the setting sun, his blue eyes cold and angry, with the chill bite of steel in them, his mouth set in the smile that Davida hated—an unamused smile.

He flung himself off his horse and tossed the reins to a "boy" who had appeared from behind the kitchen. He said nothing to Davida, but stood, one hand on his hip, a sjambok hanging by a thong from his wrist, frowning at the house; then he looked at the piccanin and houseboy. The piccanin scrambled to his feet.

"*Humba* . . . go . . . !" said Charles to him.

Pot-bellied, a ragged singlet flapping, he scuttled away towards the compound.

"And you," said Charles to the houseboy, "go to the river and fetch water."

Davida's eyes turned meditatively to the tank by the

side of the house. It was still half-full, the last rains' legacy still unspent.

The houseboy picked up a bucket and slouched resignedly away.

"Mayne been here?" inquired Charles.

Davida shook her head.

He shrugged his shoulders.

They looked at each other with a reluctant understanding, and Charles, without another word, went into the house.

### III

The sun had almost gone, red still lingered in the steel-blue sky. The big thorn tree near the house loomed blackly. The chickens that picked round the big mealie shed had gone to roost, in the stunted mopani trees that grew in the trodden, bare space by the stables. It was very quiet. From the stables an occasional stamp and snort . . . from the compound a sudden, retching cough from a *dagga* smoker. . . .

The quiet flowed in with the cool evening like a tide filling a little creek, seeping through the house as water through still reeds.

Davida remained outside. She leant against the wall of the house, her hands thrust into her coat pockets. She loved the slow invasion of night, the cold sweet air after the hot day, the gentle settling of the daylight world to rest . . . the stealthy wakening of the wild. There was

something relentless in the immense, far-reaching quiet . . . in the rolling, dim sweep of the veldt, in the thought of the scattered humans in their tiny houses, flung down haphazard in the wild places, their defiance of the solitude, their ant-like activities, scurrying here and there in infinity. . . .

There were sounds now inside the house. Thuds and footsteps. Charles putting his beastly parent to bed.

Thank Heaven, she thought, that when the Old Man built the house, he built it large and solid. When she went in he would be safely away in his own room in the L-shaped wing that he had made off the main square of the building. There was a sense of security about that thought. No need to feel at night that there was only a thin wall between them. Awful it would be to have to live in one of the little four-roomed houses with their tin roofs that sheltered so many families on the veldt. Huddled together. All through the night one would almost feel the fumes of brandy invading one's own room, would hear the snores and grunts of other sleepers, would almost see their loathsome dreams. And with the thought of the house, came the thought of its building. Charles's description. Old Man Bruce . . . young then . . . or at least only in the middle thirties . . . standing down by the river, tall and burly, the sun shining on his crisp golden beard, his hat pulled down over his eyes, his shirt open at the neck, one hand on his hip, a sjambok dangling from his wrist . . . and the gang of "boys" making bricks . . . endless activity under the baking



sun . . . carrying water, carrying mud, mixing and stirring, turning out of moulds . . . burning in the kilns . . . and over all Bruce . . . his sjambok cracking over sweating black backs, his sardonic mouth and cold eyes. . . . Something Biblical about the thing. Something Biblical altogether about the Old Man, her father-in-law. His manservant and his maidservant, his ox and his ass . . . and everything that was his. His daughter and his son and his son's wife. Alice and Charles . . . unable . . . unwilling to break away. Living there in his house. . . .

"At least," she thought, with a quick flame of rebellion, "I get away from it. At least I ride away . . . leave it behind for a few hours. At least I see other people. . . ."

She stretched out her arms and drew a deep breath as if she wanted to catch the magic of the night and fold it round her like a cloak. Then she laughed suddenly and turned and went into the house.

#### IV

The sitting-room was straightened out. The smashed remnants of Alice's abortive tea-party had been removed. The pictures were gone. The floor swept. Only the stain on the wall remained.

Charles was standing by the table, thinking, to judge by his sombre face, unpleasant thoughts. A bottle of

whisky and a sparklet syphon were on the table. As Davida came in he automatically poured out a drink and handed it to her.

"The place reeks," he said briefly.

Through the open windows the light air was filling the room with a cool draught, evaporating the staleness.

Davida went over to the window.

"I heard about it at the store," she said. "Charles, couldn't you do something to stop him advertising the matter round the district in this way?"

Charles looked at her gloomily.

"How?" he inquired.

She said no more. Obviously he was in a tiresome mood, a mood in which he would remain impervious to everything, appear merely dense if she tried to discuss matters.

He pointed to the stain on the wall and made an irritable exclamation.

"A bucket of whitewash and a brush," countered Davida tranquilly.

"It will take the hell of a lot of whitewash," he answered. "Where's Alice?"

"In her room, I think."

He laughed abruptly.

"On account of Mayne or her dear father?"

"Charles," she said sharply, "don't be a beast!"

"It must be in the family," he said casually.

He stood and looked at her, one hand on his hip, an empty glass in the other. She thought suddenly that if

he grew a beard it would be crisp and golden, and she caught her breath.

They looked at each other with a kind of mute hostility, and then, as always, the hostility wavered and broke . . . and they clung to one another. Charles muttered: "It's damnable, Davida. . . ." Davida murmured: "I know—I know!" For the moment it shelved all argument, all discussion; silenced Davida's desire to tell him once and for all that they must go away, hurled her arguments to the winds. He held her close and she remembered that when he had married her, he had not known . . . it had happened during the years he was away in France. He had brought her to the farm . . . not knowing. . . .

But this time, while she clung to him, thought persisted. They *must* go away . . . *must* be on their own . . . must. . . .

V.

Alice appeared at supper. While the other two endeavoured to carry on some sort of conversation, she remained obstinately unresponsive. It seemed as if she were determined to obtrude her unhappiness upon them, as if she thought they were unaware of it without long-drawn sighs and bitten lips to enlighten them. Davida smoked incessantly. She was half-irritated, half-sympathetic. It was unspeakably stupid of Alice, who knew perfectly well that it would only infuriate Charles. He

had a streak of ill-humour that was invariably roused by her.

He began to look at her with the sardonic bleak look that was so reminiscent of his father.

Alice was small and pretty in a dark, untidy way—she had a red pouting mouth in a small vivid face, dark eyes that she used injudiciously (endeavouring to appease Charles by languishing at him), and a weak chin. Her perpetual mooning manner and rather spineless affair with Archie annoyed Charles. He considered that she ought to have more pride. She would try to pretend to be unaware of her father's reputation when she met other people, would talk self-consciously of him in terms of affection . . . and not even to Archie, whom she hoped to marry, would she face things squarely. If it had not been for Davida's restraining influence, and the fact that it was his father's farm, Charles would have thrown Mayne off the place in one of his sudden outbursts of temper. It hurt his own pride that Mayne should hesitate about Alice. Davida knew that half his indifference was assumed. Alice could not see it. She insisted on reproaching him with not caring.

Supper was nearly through when Alice looked at the stain on the wall and gulped.

"It was a good thing Archie didn't come," she said.

"Why?" inquired Charles dryly.

"If he'd seen father, he'd never have come again!"

Tears welled into her eyes.

"Oh, for God's sake," snapped Charles and stood up.

"Davida, I'm going out . . . I'll take the gun and have a look round for those baboons by the mealies. I wish to God Mayne would have the courage of his convictions and stay away altogether. Sooner or later he will. It had much better be sooner."

"You're an ass, Alice," said Davida, "you ought to know Charles by now."

"It isn't your life being spoilt," said Alice.

She dropped into a chair in front of the log fire and gazed broodingly into the flames.

The fire crackled. Outside, bull-frogs croaked mournfully. Davida could hear Alice's watch ticking. That gave her a curious feeling. It made her more aware of Alice. She held her breath and listened for the sound of Alice's breathing: watched the firelight flickering on Alice's shoes. She felt really sorry for her, and curious about her. She raised her eyes to Alice's face and lost all her sympathy, it was so full of self-pity. She had been going to stretch out a hand and say: "Cheer up, my dear, I'll look after you. Things aren't so bad—" She said instead, casually: "Of course, I enjoy enormously all this sort of thing."

"You go out," said Alice.

"My dear child, there's another horse. Why talk as if I took the only horse and left you lamenting?"

Alice's face assumed the sullen, childish, aggrieved air that it wore when she was determined to be unhappy.

"I don't like to go out to places where they all know about father. I can feel them laughing at me . . . I'm

ashamed to go out. I wonder Charles isn't ashamed. I suppose it's different for you, he's not your father."

"*Twenty* thousand dancing devils!" thought Davida.

She said: "People don't spend all their time thinking about your father; what he does doesn't affect you. . . ."

"It affects Archie's family," interrupted Alice with a suspicious quaver in her voice.

"Well, if Archie lets it affect *him*, I don't think he's worth all this bother," said Davida wearily. She felt that there was more than a little justification for Charles's bitter remark, that if he'd had four years of undiluted Alice he'd have taken to drink himself.

"You don't understand," said Alice in the tone of one who understands the sorrows and mysteries of love, and she flopped farther back in her chair, propped her elbows on the arm and rested her face against her hand with an air of tragedy.

Davida, feeling wearily that she understood only too well, relapsed into silence.

The room, shorn of its pictures, with Davida's books in stained wood shelves, the much-polished teak table and plain chairs with criss-crossed thongs of leather forming the seats, had a certain dignity. It was large and barn-like, without a ceiling, the walls finishing abruptly against the slope of the thatched roof, where shadows danced and bowed until they were lost in the high gloom. It was really a large hall with other rooms opening off it. Charles's room where he kept his guns and a large writing-desk, at which he occasionally sat, biting his pen and

writing odd fragments of verse and a long rambling diary. When he was writing he was at his most lovable—he came to Davida for an audience. He was softer, more vulnerable at those times, dropping the sardonic indifference with which he met life. He seemed happy when he was writing . . . but for months at a time he never went near the room and never mentioned it. It was as if he were afraid of the softer side of himself, afraid of showing his feelings, of being anything but a farmer, engrossed in his farm. He would not attempt to publish anything. "It's not my job in life," he said, "and unless it's that, it's not worth publishing—I'm a farmer." And he farmed strenuously and competently for the Old Man.

Davida, contemplating the bare walls, thought with some satisfaction that the breaking of the pictures (anæmic water-colours) was probably a relief to him. They had been put up by Alice in his absence, at a time when she had tried to play the daughter of the house, just back from school, by making it feminine and attractive. That her father had observed them with an aversion he did not trouble to conceal though, equally, he did not trouble to insist on their removal, had never occurred to her. Nothing ever did occur to her unless it was said in no uncertain terms.

By and by Alice went to bed and Davida sat on by the red embers waiting for Charles. Once a gunshot broke the silence and she went on to the veranda. The veldt was bathed in moonlight: it fell in pale pools on the ground underneath the gum trees. The shot was not repeated and



the silence dropped back again perceptibly. She sighed. He might not come back for hours. . . . She went back into the room and turned down the lamp.

"What a day," she observed meditatively.

To-morrow she would go and look at those wheat "lands."

She strolled into her bedroom and undressed. As she lay in bed drowsy thoughts still invaded her mind . . . what a day . . . things were getting worse. . . .

She heard Charles's quick footsteps come past the window, the little thud as he put down the gun, and the minute or two of deathly silence before he came in.

"Get anything?" she murmured sleepily.

"Missed . . . nerves all jumpy!"

She held out her hand. "Poor darling—rotten luck!"

He came over and kissed her and stood looking down at her, tall and slim in the white moonlight.

"Poor darling yourself," he said.

She laughed, and a flood of happiness ran over her.

Almost immediately she fell asleep.

## CHAPTER TWO

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### I

DAVIDA got up early the next morning. She wanted to get the small plough and the small span of oxen down to the wheat "lands." Once they were there, there was every prospect of a whole day's ploughing. And she badly wanted that ploughing done.

When she first came out to Rhodesia, she was all enthusiasm. She absorbed knowledge during the week she spent with Charles in Salisbury. Mealies were booming. They were twenty-two shillings a bag and the mealie farmers were joyous and cheerful men, their overdrafts paid off and owning cars. Nor did they greatly trouble themselves about piling up bank balances against a slump. Davida talked to all and sundry, farmers and traders, Government experts. She imagined that she would take an active part in the farming and an odd remark from some man first put the idea of wheat into her head. He was a pessimist, gloomy-natured. He had no opinion of mealies or mealie farmers. Mealies, he said, would be of no value in the future, except as fodder. Davida was inclined to believe him. Charles, though not greatly interested, was quite prepared to grow wheat—"always provided the Old Man is willing!"

The Old Man had appeared indifferent, or rather willing to further a whim of his daughter-in-law. But after the first flush, he seemed to repent. Although he never made any open opposition, he invariably took the oxen for something else. The ploughing proceeded by slow degrees and it was necessary to get the oxen down and started before he was about, when the odds were that he would not trouble to recall them.

There was no sign of him this morning.

Charles sent off the oxen and driver and came back to have coffee with Davida before they both started for the "lands."

"What do you think," said Davida, "about having sandwiches and stuff sent down to us and staying there for lunch?"

"Yes—all right. I'm dipping the Shorthorns this morning, but I can get back to you there."

"Splendid—do," she said jubilantly.

Then, less cheerfully: "But what about Alice?"

"Look here," said Charles, "once and for all, we can't sacrifice everything we want to do for Alice. If she came, she'd only moan the whole time . . . in any case nothing will induce her to move from this veranda. Sister Anne isn't in it with her. She won't make any effort. . . ."

"Still," said Davida, "I get worried about it . . . I mean she irritates me unbearably at times . . . but then she's so miserable."

"You worry me far more," said Charles; "it's as bad for you, if not worse, and . . ."

He broke off and lit a cigarette.

"Oh, well," said Davida, "come on, let's start. I'll tell the cookboy about the 'scoff.'"

They rode away through the bright cool morning. The sun was up, but there was still only a pleasant warmth. The distance was full of a soft haziness, the kopje beyond the wheat-land grey and peaceful against the sky; and as they rode through a belt of bush, a troop of monkeys scattered, chattering angrily; a jay flashed like a sapphire streak through the dappled bush, lizards, basking in the patches of sunlight on grey rocks, vanished with a flicker.

Davida was quiet and tranced. She loved it all, the dreaming quiet of the bush, the wide *vleis* and the sunshine . . . if only . . . if only . . .

She wondered whether it was a good time to discuss things with Charles. She glanced at him. He was whistling "The Maid of Amsterdam" . . . he looked happy. . . . Why spoil things?

And then they came out of the bush and into the wheat *vlei*. The plough was already at work, the red swath cut from the golden grass stretched away down to a small river that trickled sluggishly between grey rocks: and the swath was growing. Davida found in that ever-widening strip of red ground a place of dreams, the beginning of achievement, the hope of success. It was in some way symbolic . . . she bracketed it together with

her life and marriage. With that wheat crop, she felt, it would stand or fall. If she failed over the wheat, then she would fail in her marriage. The wheat belonged to her and to Charles. It was their only real possession. In some vague way she thought of it as a possible gateway to freedom. . . . Charles had no money of his own. That, she understood, was one of the chief difficulties to their taking up land of their own. But the wheat was theirs. . . . Her heart leapt. "Almost half," she cried to Charles.

He nodded without much enthusiasm.

They hobbled their horses and sat down on a rock.

"Charles," she said suddenly, "exactly how do we stand financially?—you've never really told me."

He was sitting forward, knees apart, his hands clasped. He began to draw patterns in the sand at their feet with his sjambok.

"Davida, you know perfectly well . . . I work the place for the Old Man. It was always understood that I should come back and take over. . . ."

"Yes . . . but . . . oh, I know that whenever I want anything you always give me the money . . . but I mean, do you have so much of the profits or what?"

He moved impatiently and flushed.

"You know what the Old Man is . . . somewhat patriarchal in his ideas. He won't hand over any authority . . . or contemplate a partnership or anything like that . . . he coughs up anything we want whenever we want it. . . ."

"Yes," said Davida dreamily, "it's all very feudal! When I want new handkerchiefs . . . or a bottle of Eno's . . . do we have to tell him about it? For myself, Charles, I'd rather be hard up and on our own."

"With Alice on our hands?" he inquired grimly. "He couldn't stand her there without us, and she'd throw the most colossal fit!"

"I suppose so," she admitted.

"It can't be done, Davida. . . . For one thing I should begin to doubt my own sanity if I ever voluntarily entertained the idea of having Alice with me in my own house."

"But when your father dies, we shall have her."

"Not so . . ." he said, "it could not be required of us. She'll have her own money, and she can do what she likes . . . she won't live with us."

His hand tightened on the sjambok.

"I've thought it out, Davida . . . but it can't be done. I can't leave the Old Man. . . . I suggested it to him . . . but he won't have it. . . . He'd go to pieces. . . ."

She couldn't say the things that crowded into her head . . . could not suggest (if he did not see it) that perhaps everything else might go to pieces if he stayed . . . their marriage, for instance. . . .

"If we went," he added slowly, "it would finish the Old Man. He'd leave the farm away from me and he'd hate doing it . . . but he's said he will, and he'd stick to it if it killed him. I saw the Old Man make the

place . . . in some ways . . . he's . . . Oh, for God's sake don't let's talk about it . . . can't you understand, Davida?"

She could understand, at least she supposed she could. But, with a cold dismay, she supposed that in a question of "Pull devil, pull baker!" the devil, in other words the Old Man, would win. She put behind her the idea that it was because of the farm that Charles would not leave . . . she was sure that that did not really weigh with him. At least, not in the mercenary sense. She could understand, or rather comprehend, the fact that he would not leave his father, not *why* he would not leave his father . . . but she felt if he stayed with the Old Man, for the Old Man's sake, the least the latter could do was to behave himself decently in return . . . since Charles would rather risk his marriage than upset the old devil!

"All right," she said.

Her eyes were fixed on the widening swath. Somehow something would happen. If she couldn't move Charles, she could grow that crop.

Suddenly she chuckled.

"What a pity, Charles, that Alice hasn't got a crop to grow. . . ."

His hand caught hers and under the unwinking eye of the sun they kissed. And she laughed rather sadly. . . .



## II

Charles went off to dip the Shorthorns. He waved to her from the bend of the road and was gone, and she wondered whether he thought of her again . . . or, having finished an argument with kisses, he turned contentedly to the business of the day.

She lay under a thorn tree, reading a book, listening to the droning cries of the driver M'Shebi. Nearly noon . . . they would stop then . . . for an hour or two. Charles would be back. The cookboy would soon arrive with lunch.

She raised herself on one elbow and looked down at the team, and then she saw the "boy" coming with the lunch. He was a tall "boy" with a scarlet cloth wound like a skirt beneath his white coat. Ebony, white, and scarlet against the green of the bush and the blue of the sky. "Very decorative," thought Davida lazily. "I will say our household is positively classy. . . ."

But when the "boy" came up, he carried, with the lunch, a message.

"My dear Davida, I am afraid I must trouble you to release the oxen. The small peach orchard needs ploughing up, and I am sure you will not refuse an old man the pleasure of making a garden . . . the whims of the old were designed for the better discipline of the young, and there is still a long month in which to finish the

ploughing of your land. Incidentally, I am disappointed that you have decided to lunch picnic fashion. There is an excellent lunch at home. . . . One that you and Charles would appreciate. Alice, as you know, is, owing to the distempers of love, unable to appreciate decent living. . . .”

Davida flushed crimson. For a moment she stood indecisive, tearing the note into small pieces that fluttered away, dazzling in the bright sunshine. She felt sick with the consciousness of her impotence. They were his oxen . . . the old beast with his calculated unpleasantness. . . . He could eat his gastronomical triumphs with the unappreciative Alice . . . and Charles, if Charles cared to go. For herself, food ordered by the Old Man and supervised by him would choke her.

She called M'Shebi and told him to go back to the homestead, and scribbled on the back of an old envelope an answer.

“Am so sorry, but cannot in any case return to lunch . . . may ride over to the Templemans’.”

“That’s that,” she commented with a gloomy triumph. She knew that he had counted on her return, defeated over the ploughing, and she knew the bland content with which he would have eaten his lunch. He always ordered the food and superintended the cooking. He said that since he had relinquished the active business of farming, he had taken over the business of catering,

because in his old age he wished to attain the illusion of civilization, and no woman possessed the remotest idea of food or real comfort. He grew peaches and figs, grena-dillas and strawberries. . . . "I keep a good table . . ." he said, and was fond of alluding to his fellow-farmers, in expansive moments, as "mealie-fed louts."

The brightness of the morning had gone. The calm sunlight was unreal and irritating. If only she had some money of her own she would have bought oxen and plough and paid a driver . . . this perpetual pandering to someone else . . . but even then she would have had to ask if he minded her oxen on his farm. . . .

She sat down again and tried to read, waiting for Charles; but she could not concentrate again, and at last, gazing for the twentieth time at her watch and finding it one o'clock, she stood up impatiently and listened for the sound of hoof-beats. But there was complete silence except for the far-away cooing of doves. The drowsy noon lay over the veldt, the tall burnt grass swayed lazily under a little breeze, the peak of the kopje was crowned by the figure of the old baboon that Charles had sworn to annihilate. He squatted insolently and securely, a mocker of rifles and the vain imaginings of men. M'Shebi and the oxen were gone, the unfinished swath mocked at her . . . and there was no sign of Charles.

It was, she knew, quite possible that he had met the returning oxen and concluded that she also was returning, but (and a dark anger filled her) how dare he con-

clude that she was one of his father's creatures to run meekly at his bidding?

Feeling slightly mean, since she could clearly visualize a tearful Alice and an angry Charles, she saddled up and rode towards the Templemans' farm. She was uneasily conscious of moral cowardice. If she had waited for Charles, he would have said with sweet reasonableness: "Well, old thing, if the ploughing's off, hadn't we better go back to lunch?"

And she would have weakly acquiesced.

### III

The Templemans existed simply and uncomfortably in three mud huts. Lydia had not even troubled to have them whitewashed. She had the knack of remaining completely oblivious of her surroundings. Probably, thought Davida, she was under the impression that the huts *were* whitewashed. They stood on a slight rise in the middle of a big bare *vlei*. Around them was a patch of trampled reddish sand, where chickens scratched and pecked about, and two dogs lay under the shade of the drooping thatch. The *vlei* was scarred and slashed by Oliver Templeman's plough. Yet there was no sense of desolation. The hard, bright sunlight gave it a clear-cut brilliance, black shadows and glaring ground, but the Templemans walked about, both clad in shirts and shorts, both with their hands thrust into their pockets, both with lazy,

easy strides; and when one sat with them outside their huts, one was aware only of Lydia and Oliver, and their surroundings melted into vagueness.

Lydia was leaning against one of the huts, absently polishing her nails, when Davida came into sight. She was not young . . . her lazy, graceful figure gave the impression of youth, her short curling hair and her graceless smile . . . but there were fine lines round her dark eyes, her dark hair was threaded with silver . . . she was so like a gipsy that one missed the red handkerchief and the gay scarf. . . .

"Oliver's down at the dip," she called, "but he'll be back for 'scoff,' bacon and potatoes!"

She walked by the side of Davida's horse to the stable that hid behind the huts, a stable that was as well built as the huts were badly built. And as they strolled back she called to the cookboy to fry more potatoes.

"I thought you might be over," she said, "the Old Man rode past yesterday, like the old devil he is, singing at the top of his voice and rocking about in the saddle. He had a bottle of brandy with him, too. He threw it at the herd boy in passing . . . it hit him, too, and he's not working to-day. However, he's quite resigned about it, regarding the old devil as mad."

They went into the cool, dark interior of the dining-hut, where the light filtered in through green mosquito netting nailed over holes in the wall. A patch of sunlight fell in an oblong across the trampled mud floor from the open door.

Lydia sat on the table. Davida sat in a rookie-chair by the patch of sunlight.

"D'you think he went anywhere near the Maynes'?" she asked Lydia.

"Sure to, he was heading that way. Personally, I think he goes that way on purpose . . . as a way of showing his affection for Alice. Cheer up, my dear, one day he'll fall off his horse, comfort yourself with that."

"You're an immoral woman, Lydia . . . but remember the saying about drunkards and children."

Lydia carelessly shooed out a too-inquisitive chicken, and a large grey dog sauntered in and laid his head on Davida's knee. She patted him absently.

"I envy you, Lydia," she said, "not that I could live in quite the same magnificent disregard of the material comforts . . . but I could dispense with a lot of them . . . and still more could I dispense with the atmosphere of uneasy comfort in which we live. If it were not for Charles, I should fling a plate at the Old Man any day."

"Throw it," advised Lydia, "then Charles would have to do something."

Davida laughed.

"I said," she observed, "but imagination baulks at the reality!"

Lydia slid off the table and her eyes shone. The steady thud of galloping hoofs sounded. Oliver on the way. With a slight regret Davida thought that the arrival of Charles would not so illuminate her own face . . . not that she did not love him, but somehow . . . some-

how . . . Charles himself would not encourage that sort of thing. There was an ever shining romance about Lydia and Oliver. . . .

Lydia had gone.

The hut seemed to have lost something . . . vitality perhaps. The dog also had vanished. Davida heard Oliver arrive and Lydia's voice, clear and enthusiastic. . . .

There was nothing in the hut but the rookie-chair, and an old soap box, not even disguised with cretonne. Rumour, ever busy in the district, hinted that the Templemans were on their last legs, that they couldn't survive another season. Oliver had missed the mealie boom. He had been trying to grow some sort of hemp. Davida wondered, with her eyebrows drawn together, whether Lydia was quite so oblivious as she seemed, whether it was not mere indifference but sheer necessity that caused the casual discomfort. She thought of asking Charles . . . but he didn't like the Templemans.

"Hullo," said Oliver, stooping in the low doorway and peering into the green gloom.

He was very tall and thin, with a dark face and nut-brown eyes. A network of fine wrinkles surrounded his eyes from staring out over the sunlit, glaring grass. His voice was as gentle as his smile.

Lydia followed him and he slipped his arm round her shoulder, his eyes looked down at her with an affection that was less irradiated than hers. There was a dispirited droop about his shoulders. Davida sighed. She felt a grey mist between her and the sun, as if some indefinable



unhappiness threatened these two, who were so happy together. She stood up as if it were some physical discomfort that she could shake off. Ridiculous! She must be getting nervy.

"Does that wretched cattle inspector bother Charles?" asked Oliver. "He's been round this morning going through my twenty cows with a magnifying glass . . . he nearly sobbed when he didn't find a tick. I somehow don't think he likes me."

Davida saw Lydia's eyes darken. "He's never forgiven you for giving that evidence when he tried to run old Barneveldt for moving cattle without permission," she said, and stretched out a protecting arm towards him. "Do be careful, he's a vindictive brute."

Oliver laughed.

"My dear, what can he do?"

Lydia turned to Davida with a sudden anxiety in her face.

"You know he often forgets to dip . . . I remind him, and he goes off to do it and forgets what he went for. He'll be fined one day."

Again that unease fell upon Davida. Lydia's face was strained, her eyes more earnest than usual. Davida looked at them worriedly, her own face pale in the aqueous light, her eyes shadowed.

"Lydia," she said, "you don't let Barry worry you?"

She saw Barry in her mind's eye, a small shrivelled man, dried up by the African sun, with small bright eyes, angry eyes. But what harm could he do the Templemans?

Unless—unless a fine would really break them. Life was sickening. Here were the only two people she really cared about besides Charles, and she couldn't help them if the pinch came, just because she had to live according to the whims of a drunken old reprobate and because Charles acquiesced in it. But she *must* be getting nervy . . . so long as Lydia prompted Oliver about the dipping, Barry couldn't manufacture ticks on the cattle. Lydia couldn't really be seriously worried. But the uneasy feeling persisted. There was something in Lydia's eyes . . . worry . . . something lacking in her manner. To-day . . . she looked older. . . .

Oliver dispelled the gloom.

"She worries about me quite unnecessarily. I've dipped every week regularly. I've stocked up her larder with enough dried buck to keep her for a year . . . I've been thoroughly practical and exemplary."

And Lydia laughed.

"I shot most of the buck myself. Oliver will let a duyker sit under his nose and not notice it."

"Well, anyway," protested Oliver, "I'm noticing now how extremely hungry I am."

They sat, after lunch, over coffee and cigarettes, until Davida said she must go. Oliver went round to the stable to get her horse, and as she and Lydia stood outside the hut, his half-finished ploughed lands lay in front of them. There was no sign of a driver, only a piccanin squatted on his haunches by the oxen. They were out-

spanned, grazing on the dry grass by the side of the "lands." Oliver came back with the horse.

"Sixty acres under mealies this year," he said.

Davida nodded. She was sure mealies would be down this year, and Oliver had never grown a decent crop yet, so Charles said; couldn't buy decent seed or something.

"Why don't you grow some wheat?" she asked casually.

Lydia's graceless smile broke out.

"For Heaven's sake, Davida, don't urge him on to more experiments—he'll go bankrupt."

And as Davida swung into the saddle and then sat looking down at them, she smiled back. There was something about them . . . something eternally young. Lydia with her fine recklessness, Oliver with his gentle smile. . . .

She waved her riding-crop at them and cantered away.

## CHAPTER THREE

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### I

ARCHIE MAYNE rode up to the Bruce homestead with a slightly ashamed air. The quiet white house, the garden that ran down to the clipped hedge, the lawn of carefully mowed grass and its rose-trees that had grown into large, fragrant bushes, Old Man Bruce clipping the myrobalan hedge, his white hair shining in the sunlight, his beard trimmed and brushed, his tall figure immaculate in white duck, his cultured, genial appearance, seemed to dismiss as wild impossibilities the events of the last few years. Almost Archie felt that he himself had been raving drunk and imagined he had seen a dishevelled, disreputable, foul-mouthed, white-haired sot raving past the window of his house yesterday. Almost he doubted the evidence of his own pleasant blue eyes.

The Old Man nodded patronizingly as the boy rode past. Archie presumed that he did not remember the events of the day before, which relieved his own embarrassment.

A flicker of white on the veranda made him uncomfortably aware that Alice had been waiting there and had now gone indoors, to appear, when he arrived, looking surprised. He hoped fervently that Davida was some-

where about. Nowadays he found himself always hoping that Davida would be there and so relieve the tension of a *tête-à-tête* with Alice.

Nobody was on the veranda. The Old Man did not leave his clipping. Archie tethered his horse to a veranda post and hoped that that would prove an excuse for a short visit.

After a short interval Alice appeared. She walked out with an air of indifference, stopped short and widened her eyes.

"I heard someone ride up and wondered who it was. . . ."

Archie flushed. He was truthful by nature and without guile. Alice's refusal to be candid and natural worried him. He did not know how to meet her. At times he felt that if only she would say: "Damn my beastly father . . . he's utterly impossible . . ." he would be able to say in return: "Yes, well let him go to blazes and you marry me." Instead, the Old Man was a forbidden topic, and yet he pervaded the conversation. Alice alluded to him with a strained gentility. . . . "Father is not very well to-day." Her eyes would drop and she would sigh.

"Who did you expect?" he asked, and inwardly reviled his weakness. He ought to call her bluff.

Alice smiled mysteriously.

"There are other people in the district."

"Oliver Templeman, or young Barneveldt?" inquired Archie with youthful sarcasm, "or Mr. Sylvester?"

Alice bit her lip and flounced. Then, though she had made up her mind not to mention it: "Why didn't you come yesterday?" she asked abruptly.

He looked at his toes. "Well, as a matter of fact one of the dairy cows was sick."

He felt her looking at him with the anxious, reproachful glance that embarrassed him.

"Oh . . ." she sighed, wistful and maddening.

"Where's Davida?" he asked.

"I don't know. She went off somewhere. You know Davida, how mysterious she is—always riding round on her own. In any case, why do you want to know?"

"I don't know. I like Davida—she's amusing."

Alice clasped her hands agitatedly.

"You always want someone else here now . . . you never want to be alone with me like you used to. You don't . . . like me any more."

He was sorry for her, sorry and ashamed: with a glance over his shoulder he caught hold of her and kissed her.

"Don't be silly," he mumbled, "but it's all so difficult . . . you're different, too!"

"I'm not, I'm not," she wailed. "Archie, Archie, I'm so miserable, say you love me."

"You know I do. . . ."

He kissed her again and let her go. And all the time, in his mind, were fragments of sentences. His mother . . . "A most unfortunate entanglement . . . she's not the sort of girl to make anyone happy . . . now Davida . . ."

And, damn it all, Alice made it seem more and more true. It seemed impossible that he ever could have loved her . . . even ridden miles just in hope of seeing her.

He kissed her again weakly.

She broke away.

"Dad's coming!"

The Old Man was advancing towards the house. He stopped at intervals to look at a rose bush, bending over it with an air of intent affection, and all the time Archie felt convinced that he could see all that was going on, had been aware of both of them even when he was clipping the hedge.

"I ought to be getting back," he said hastily.

Her reproachful resignation maddened him even while it weakened his determination. He was the victim of his conscience. He preferred to avoid decisions. He was drifting steadily away from Alice towards his family's ideas, he no longer wanted to see her, and his conscience forced him to continue seeing her.

The Old Man reached the veranda and stood looking at them with an amiable smile.

Archie was miserably conscious that he looked hang-dog.

"Well, Mayne," said the old man, "it's some time since we've seen you."

"I've been horribly busy, sir," explained Archie.

The Old Man observed his young pink-and-white embarrassment with a pleased smile. Inwardly he considered that Alice was just what the young man deserved



. . . silly young cub . . . full of conventional ideas. He might marry Alice yet, because he thought he ought to. If he was fool enough for that, he deserved Alice.

He turned his pleased smile on to Alice.

"Is there no tea ready, my dear?" he inquired.

Alice blushed a bright, painful crimson.

"I didn't expect anyone," she stammered.

"And yet," said the Old Man, "every day for the last week tea has been laid with meticulous care. Did you expect anyone who had the bad taste not to come?"

But Alice, in an agony of embarrassment, had gone. She remembered suddenly that there were no tea-things. Nothing except a few cracked kitchen cups and saucers. She went out to the kitchen and stood and stared at them.

On the veranda the Old Man sat down in a big wicker chair. He waved Archie to another.

"I really ought to go," said Archie.

"Nonsense, you've only been here ten minutes."

Archie, looking longingly out over the *vlei*, saw Davida riding home. With an inward sigh of relief he sat down.

But the Old Man had seen.

"Ah, Davida," he said, and smiled and stroked his beard.

Archie felt guiltily that his inward relief had been most glaringly apparent. He blushed.

Davida arrived at the gallop, pulled her horse almost to its haunches and flung herself off. She threw the reins

to a "boy" who happened to be passing, and walked moodily towards the veranda. All the way back she had been thinking of the Templemans, and a growing resentment against Charles had attacked her.

She walked defiantly on to the veranda.

"My dear," said her father-in-law silkily, "you should have stayed at the Templemans until it was cooler . . . to ride like that in the heat of the day is good neither for you nor for the horse!"

"I quite agree," said Davida. "Hullo, Archie . . . after many years!"

"Ah," said her father-in-law, "Mayne was just about to go, but when he saw you coming, he changed his mind and decided to stay! He tells me he has been excessively busy. . . ."

Davida laughed.

"Archie is young and enthusiastic," she said, "but where's Alice . . . and where's tea?"

"I can only surmise that Alice is endeavouring to produce some tea," said the Old Man.

He had lit a cigar and was regarding the ascending blue smoke with an appreciative eye.

Davida made a face at Archie.

"I'll go and help," she said.

Archie watched her walk away with the feeling of one abandoned and without hope.

But the Old Man smiled amiably and began to discuss the rapid decline of Rhodesia. The new farmers, he said, were men without brain or initiative. They should have

stayed in England and grown cabbages and allotments. They were without savour, pallid followers of the pioneers.

## II

Alice was still staring tragically at the kitchen crockery. The cookboy was on his knees in front of the stove, pushing little bits of stick between the bars, and blowing violently.

"Look," said Alice dramatically when Davida came into the kitchen, and with outflung arm she indicated the bits of crockery.

Davida looked, and a faint amusement flickered in her eyes.

"Let Sixpence make the tea," she suggested, "and let him bring it in. The immaculate Mac is presumably having a siesta."

She contemplated the cookboy's attire. It was simple to a degree . . . a ragged singlet and a strip of dingy calico.

"He'll be furious," complained Alice.

"Well, my dear, I'm not going to rout Mac out. He ought to be here, unless your father has deliberately sent him off. He's quite capable of doing so, simply because he knows it would upset you when Archie is here. You always rise like a trout, Alice . . . he thinks you will run frantically round trying to find the 'boy.'"

The cookboy had succeeded in blowing the bits of

wood to a blaze, and steam was pouring out of the spout of the kettle.

"Bring in tea," said Davida briefly.

She took Alice firmly by the arm and led her away. As they went across to the house, she saw M'Shebi lounging by the mealie shed.

"M'Shebi," she called, "what ploughing has been done to-day?"

M'Shebi grinned cheerfully.

"Nothing, Inkosigaas! When I returned the Inkoos asked me to wait. I have been waiting."

Davida looked at Alice. "You know," she said, "he hopes to get a rise out of me by that . . . and he won't. So don't you let him get one out of you over the tea."

Her eyes were like shallow pools, clear water over grey rock, bright and unshadowed.

But as she spoke she realized the childishness of it all, the futility, and at the same time the fact that the Old Man knew well that continuous pinpricks can drive people mad, and dealt in them deliberately. He was full of hate . . . it dwelt behind his bland blue eyes, it flared in his drunken outbursts, his "jags." For undoubtedly, thought Davida, his drunken bouts were deliberate, premeditated. He did not drink weakly, going from drink to drink, not realizing his increasing drunkenness. He sat down and deliberately got drunk, for some dark reason. She imagined him, his eyes bright and hard, smiling sardonically beneath his beard, sitting down to get drunk, without pleasure. The hate inside him driving

him on. She wondered what he hated . . . life? Did life, the urges of humans to live and propagate their species, or the human race itself fill him with utter loathing? He had enormous control over himself. He would not let his hate become complete madness. He drank, she thought, deliberately to loosen his control, to let his hate break out.

How long, thought she, as she went into her room to wash before tea, would she be able to counter with amused indifference, with philosophic reasoning?

## III

The veranda was full of the late afternoon glow; very peaceful with its wicker chairs and bright cushions and the curling blue smoke from the Old Man's cigar.

Outside, the Shorthorn herd plodded slowly towards the paddock, the herd boy's blue loin-cloth vivid against the burnt gold of the grass. The air was full of lowing and the bellowing of the bull.

Alice's cheeks were still scarlet with resentment, but she looked pretty in her white frock, with her shining dark hair. And Archie looked so very correct a young man, so beautifully booted and spurred, so well brushed and brilliantined, so perfect a specimen of the young Englishman. And the Old Man was so handsome, so courtly, leaning back in his chair and smiling at them. They looked very English, waiting for the conventional

English five o'clock tea. Davida appeared strange and foreign in riding breeches and shirt, with short, wavy hair and bright, transparent eyes.

"Tea will be here soon," said the Old Man. "I am sure that now Davida has come there will be no more delay!"

"Tea will assuredly be here," said Davida.

She almost added the information that Mac was not to be found, and that there had been a catastrophe in the kitchen, and the cookboy had dropped all the crockery, but she let it go. She would leave the explanations to him. He could explain away his own actions. . . . Alice, she observed with relief, was keeping her end up, and talking quite cheerfully to Archie.

The cookboy shambled in with the tea. He put it down in a slovenly manner—four odd cups, one saucerless, a chipped plate of bread and butter, and the silver teapot dented.

A slow flush spread over the Old Man's face.

"I must apologize for my household's idea of house-keeping," he said acridly.

"It was my idea," said Davida equably. "Owing to an unforeseen occurrence all the china was broken yesterday . . . and by the most unfortunate of coincidences, we are without the houseboy to-day. He is supposed to be here at tea-time . . . but there is no sign of him."

"It doesn't matter for me," said Archie hastily and politely, "our boy is always breaking things, we often find ourselves short."

"Really, Archie?" said Davida. "But how lucky for

you that it never happens when you have visitors! Whenever I've been to see you, we've had tea in positive state."

She felt her father-in-law's eyes upon her, and lit a cigarette.

Alice nervously began to pour out tea.

The Old Man waved away a cloud of cigar smoke.

"Do I seriously understand that Mac cannot be found?" he asked.

"I didn't say that . . . merely that he was not to be seen . . . and I cannot see why I should have to search for him. I meant to ask you to speak to him."

The tinkle of a Kaffir piano sounded, faint and elusive across the still air.

"I think," said Davida, "that that must be him . . . he evidently prefers melody to housework."

There would be ructions, she thought. There was nothing he loathed more than the implication that his boys were not superlatively trained and well in hand. She was sure he had sent Mac off. He had intended to embarrass Alice. . . . Well, for herself, she didn't care if the houseboy appeared insubordinate and slack . . . she had shifted the embarrassment as well and as thoroughly as she could: now, to put it vulgarly, he could "lump it." He would not, she knew, admit that he had sent Mac off.

He stood up and carefully put out his cigar.

"Alice," he said, "be so good as to tell the cookboy to fetch Mac, and to remove this attempt at tea."



There was silence when Alice was gone. Davida stared out over the *vlei*. There was a cloud of golden dust following the vanishing herd. Where was Charles? The smouldering anger of the afternoon grew into chill resentment . . . fanned by apprehension. She could see the Old Man's eyes, and there was a glare in them that alarmed her.

"Have a cigarette, Archie," she said, and her voice sounded unnaturally loud.

Mac appeared in the doorway.

He looked at the tea-table and grinned.

The Old Man thoughtfully picked up his sjambok and fingered it. He said something in Chiswina that Davida did not understand, and, as the grin on Mac's face faded into bewilderment, swung the sjambok through the air and hit him across the chest twice. The sjambok ripped the "boy's" coat, and a red, grazed weal showed. Mac staggered and recovered himself, his face set into a sullen immobility. With an almost dignified manner he took up the tea-tray and went out.

Davida stared at him with wide, sick eyes. He was very pale, his blue eyes staring and glittering; the twitch of his nostril and his fixed smile told her that what he had done to Mac was what he would willingly have done to her. He would rather have done it to her. He *had* to do it to someone.

He bowed very courteously to Archie and went away to his own room. He swayed slightly as he walked.

"I say," said Archie in amazed tones, "does he always do that to the natives if they annoy him?"

Davida opened her mouth, remembered that he did not know the real truth, and shut it firmly.

"Not always," she said dryly.

Archie picked up his hat, then hesitated. He was not good at picking up fine shades of atmosphere, but Davida was very white.

"Shall I stay till your husband comes?" he asked awkwardly.

Davida's eyebrows arched.

"My dear . . . why ever should you?"

Alice peered round the door.

"What did he do?" she said in a scared whisper. "Oh, Archie, are you going?"

"Must," he said.

He fidgeted with his hat, vaguely conscious of something underlying the scene with the houseboy, alarmed by the strangeness, the queerness of such a household, thinking longingly of his own conventional, pleasant home. . . .

"Oh, do go," said Davida edgily.

"Well—good-bye—see you both soon——"

Alice stood watching until his figure became blurred and lost, and the faint clip-clop of hoofs was merged into the heavy silence. The dusk crept across the *vlei*, obliterating the clear green of the sunset sky. Davida shivered and turned away. But Alice stood on for a long time.

By and by she went into her bedroom and shut the door.

## I V

Davida sat in the dusky veranda, waiting for Charles.

Now she *would* tell him that it was impossible. She would rather live in a mud hut on mealie porridge . . . anything! He could not see . . . he could not realize what his father was like. He could not know that he was not quite sane. A dreadful, half-mad old man. . . .

And where was Charles, anyway?—probably with the tractor down on the mealie “lands.” The farm was an obsession with him . . . everything else might go by the board, herself, Alice . . . everything so long as he did not lose the farm!

She sat very still, hardly seeming to breathe. She was very conscious of the Old Man’s nearness. He, too, was waiting for Charles. She wondered what they said to each other when they were alone. There was no sign of life out in the kitchen. It was uncannily quiet. Even the compound was destitute of coughs and songs.

A figure loomed up out of the dimness. Charles. He walked on to the veranda wearily and dropped into a chair.

“Where the devil’s the sundowner tray?” he said.

The lamp in the sitting-room was alight. It threw golden beams across his face. He looked tired and dusty.

"Where have you been?" asked Davida, sitting very still.

He laughed, almost apologetically.

"Ploughing your wheat 'lands' with the small plough and the six half-trained oxen. I didn't get much done . . . but I was damned annoyed about this morning."

She made an effort to remain cold and determined . . . but it was half-hearted.

"How were the Templemans?" he asked.

She couldn't go on being ungenerous. He had gone down there with the small plough, expecting to find her there, and she had gone. . . .

She claimed to act always by reason. "One should not," she used to say, "allow reason to be swamped by emotion." But with her reason was always swamped by emotion when she dealt with Charles.

"I'm worried about them. Charles, it was terribly nice of you . . . I wish I hadn't gone."

He laughed.

"Yes, in your fine frenzy, you let the sandwiches go back. I hadn't anything to eat. Ma—ac! where the devil's the whisky?"

She sat up straight and told him about the afternoon's events, but somehow she could not voice her conviction that the Old Man had deliberately sent Mac away. It sounded too mean, too futile a story. . . .

"Oh, God," said Charles in a tone of utter weariness. "I'll go and talk to him."

"I'll go and dress in the meantime," she said.

When she got to her bedroom, she stared out of the window. Already the moon was rising, golden in a dark-blue sky, the low line of bush lay black and mysterious beyond the pale *vlei* . . . a little wind rustled the grass and sighed round the homestead. She leant her hot face against the cool glass, and closed her eyes. She would not live anywhere else in the world. . . . If only she could live with Charles . . . alone.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### I

ARCHIE had not been over for three weeks, and they were seldom visited by anyone else. The Old Man had done nothing but potter about the garden in the intervals of reading on the veranda. He was always there. One could not come into the house without seeing him.

Charles had sent into Salisbury for a new tea-set, and every afternoon Alice sat by the table, becoming more and more strained as the sun sank and the shadows edged towards the house.

There had been no ploughing done for Davida's wheat. Every morning the Old Man had indicated his need of the oxen, and at the same time had announced that he wanted more mealies planted, so that Charles was not to be seen from morning till night, when he appeared dead tired, his face smudged with tractor oil, to bathe and dress, dine silently, and go early to bed. Davida said nothing to him. The days were racing by, soon it would be too late to plant her wheat; and she felt with an almost passionate intensity that if Charles let it go without an effort to help her, it would rankle unbearably. Her face as she went about was intent and serious, her mind revolved round and round the wheat. The quiet of the

veldt was punctuated by the distant chug-chug of the tractor, and its regular working added to the nagging annoyance. The tractor would plough her land in two days. And the oxen waited about with M'Shebi for the Old Man to use them. At odd moments during the day he would say to Davida, with a fine assumption of unawareness, "I shall want those oxen shortly . . . we're just working down to the orchard."

Davida stayed at home, irritated by the sight of the idle oxen, because she would not give way to the feeling of defeat that urged her to let it all go, and remove herself out of the sight of the victor. She would stay around and outdo him in bland, apparent unconsciousness. If he insisted on stopping her planting, at least she would be on the spot and force him to keep up the pretence that he was going to use the oxen . . . if she went off to the Templemans', he would be able to relax into complete content.

## II

Davida, with Charles, rode over to the monthly farmers' meeting. Alice had listlessly refused to come; she knew that Archie never went.

They rode through the hot morning in silence. There was nothing to talk about . . . perfunctory inquiries on Davida's part about the mealie "lands" . . . and from Charles nothing but perfunctory replies. The unploughed wheat "lands" were in both their minds, and to both of



them, as a subject of conversation, taboo. It seemed to Davida that they were undergoing a period of endless waiting, waiting that might go on for years. Until the Old Man died, or Charles really made up his mind to leave the farm, there was nothing in sight but these strained silences.

They crossed the Sylvesters' drift and cantered on, overtaking the Sylvesters themselves in a dilapidated cape cart. Mrs. Sylvester leant out and greeted them effusively. She was a massive, untidy woman, who, on occasions such as the farmers' meeting, habitually took leave of her senses and dressed strangely. Now she was attired in a green silk dress, much pleated and frilled, a Leghorn straw hat that flapped up and down, and dirty white kid gloves. Sylvester was a tired, thin man, very red and burnt of face, with sunken grey eyes. He was very silent, vouchsafing a curt nod. He seemed more at ease with his mules than with his family, and kept up an incessant hissing and clicking, which they apparently understood since he hardly used the reins.

The Sylvester girl sat behind, her legs dangling over the back of the cart. She could not speak owing to the bumps, which obliged her to clutch the sides tightly, and left her completely breathless. She was a big girl with a clear brown skin and her father's eyes, dark grey, and a wide passionate mouth. She had a slim, strong figure.

She gasped out sentences addressed to Charles, though she looked at Davida, who mentally paired her off with young Barneveldt. They would go well together. He

was a tall, loose-limbed youth, with blue-black hair and dark, kind eyes. One could picture them farming together. Barneveldt would be at the meeting, and afterwards he would sit under the gum trees by the meeting-house and eat with the Sylvesters, staring at Eileen and munching audibly.

Davida got bored and cantered ahead. She had just thought that possibly she might write home to her father and ask him if he could give her enough money to buy a span of oxen and a plough. She was sure he would, if he could, but she was not sure how Charles would take it. It would be a tacit defiance. And she would have to ask the Old Man if she could keep them on the farm . . . and she would have to hire a driver and leader. She wasn't sure about it. It would be the first open difference between herself and Charles. How far would Charles back her up over the wheat if she could only think out some scheme?

She had left the mule cart well behind, and was in the dappled shade of a narrow line of bush. The track was gashed by wash-aways and boulders: she slowed to a walk. It was warm and rustling in the bush, already the leaves were turning red and purple, dry and shrivelled under the hot sun. Already the tongues of fire leapt and flickered along the horizon at night, like fantastic devil-dancers, where the veldt was burning. Oliver had been burning fireguards . . . she couldn't remember whether Charles had made any or not. She hardly knew where he

had been these last weeks, except for the noisy clatter of the tractor.

She came out of the bush and crossed the patch of bare, burnt earth that stretched away towards the store and the Farmers' Meeting House. They were late. Already there were several mule carts, with the mules outspanned and hobbled, and horses kicked and stamped by the hitching rail outside the store.

The Maynes' car stood by the store, and Davida saw Archie talking to a slim, laughing girl, Miriam Davis. Her father was something or other in the Civil Service. "Heigh-ho!" thought Davida, "thank Heaven Alice is not with us!"

"Hullo," said Archie as she drew up, "I thought you never came to these affairs."

"I hardly ever do," retorted Davida, "pure chance and boredom brought me . . . but I thought you also refused to grace them with your presence."

He made a resigned gesture. "Dad wanted to make a row about something . . . someone's oxen straying across his land . . . and mother thought we had better all come, and bring Miriam to see the primitive people of the veldt. She's lived in Salisbury all her life, and doesn't know what the back-veldt is like!"

The rattle and clatter of the Sylvesters' cart interrupted. Charles was looking morose and he hardly responded to Archie's greeting. He took Davida's horse and his own round to the shade of the gum trees.

Davida went into the store. Barry, the cattle inspec-

tor, was leaning against the counter talking to Mr. Mayne. "You see," Mr. Mayne was saying: "it's sheer carelessness. The fellow never looks after anything. He ought to have a herd boy, not that piccanin. Next time it happens I shall put them in the pound, and he can pay to get them out."

"That's poor Oliver," thought Davida. "Disagreeable old pig, Mayne is!"

The men began to drift off to the meeting, where they would wrangle for an hour over the evil doings of their representative, the vile behaviour of the administration, the gross favouritism shown by the banks to the mining people, and the appalling price paid for oxen by the butchers. The majority of them bred from native cattle and half-bred bulls, and were annoyed that the steers didn't fatten well, and they wouldn't feed them. They showed the firm denseness and objection to progressive farming that seems indivisible from most farmers, and grunted angrily at the exhortations of the government experts. They struggled on, carrying enormous overdrafts on their shoulders, and groused. They did not take either the Bruces or the Maynes seriously, because they considered them as amateur farmers, with private means (the Old Man was reputed to have prospered exceedingly in the early days, when for some time he traded with the natives). That both the Bruces and the Maynes made their farms pay they did not believe: they laughed heartily at the silos and their habit of occasionally growing soil-enriching crops between whiles. The district was

not a popular one, and did not boast any really gay society. There were no romantic and dashing young men (Archie could hardly be counted: he spent most of his time in Salisbury, as did Douglas Pelham, the only other young and dashing farmer); there were, in fact, neither in the Bruces' district nor many others, none of those witty and fascinating people who gladden the eyes of their neighbours, and have incredibly amusing lives and whom Rhodesia is credited with possessing to such an enchanting degree. The farmers farmed, cheerfully or morosely, according to their several natures, and shot buck for food and marauding leopards without feeling that they added to the quota of heroes in the wold by so doing.

Charles put his head inside the store door.

"Coming in?" he inquired.

"I'll wait outside," said Davida.

She wandered out of the store and over to the gum trees. Mrs. Sylvester was already there with Eileen. Mrs. Mayne and Miriam had braved the meeting, presumably, for the further education of Miriam in the habits of the back-veldt. Davida pulled a book out of her pocket and assumed an air of deep absorption. By extreme strength of will she conquered her natural politeness, pretended not to see Mrs. Sylvester's nods and becks, and walked round to the other side of the trees; there she sat down, put her fingers in her ears and began to read.

Before long, however, Archie and Miriam strolled up.

"Too much atmosphere," explained Miriam.

"It is rather rich," said Davida.

They sat down and began to discuss Salisbury and dances.

"You should come in sometimes," said Miriam with the chatty condescension of the town dweller for the rustic.

Davida shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm a farmeress, intensely interested in wheat . . . and Charles has his nose glued to a tractor."

"You ought to make Archie motor you in," said Miriam; "what's the use of a rich young bachelor with a car in the district if you don't make use of him. . . ."

There was in her tone a certainty that only with her approval would Archie motor anyone in.

"I thought," said Davida, "that it was his father's car."

Archie was busily filling his pipe. Obviously Miriam was blissfully unaware of Alice's existence, or at any rate her existence so far as it concerned Archie.

Davida considered what powerful motive was keeping Mrs. Mayne in the tobacco-laden atmosphere of the meeting, and decided that it was nothing but mother-love . . . in order to keep Archie away from Alice she was prepared to die of heat under the tin roof, and shudder at the noisy and natural expectorations, so that he might walk around and fall in love with Miriam. He was quite prepared to do so, there was only poor Alice to stop him doing so with a clear conscience.

"She must feel very strongly about Alice," thought Davida, "more strongly than I should have thought necessary."



Miriam was pretty and self-confident. She was pleased with her clothes, her short hair, her own conversation and Archie's company. She was the victim of no doubts as to her power of keeping him bound to her chariot wheels.

"It's all over bar the shouting," thought Davida. "Oh, damn it all, I ought to be far angrier than I am about it."

But she wasn't angry, only aware that sentiment demanded that she ought to be. A sneaking sympathy for the Maynes filled her. It was Alice herself, and not the Old Man, who had driven Archie away . . . opposition would have only made him more obstinate if Alice had not been so tiresome.

Some natives were walking along the track to the store, the women carrying babies. It was very hot and flies buzzed exasperatingly around her head. The natives squatted down philosophically outside the store to wait for Thorogood to come out and sell them beads and calico, blankets, and the abominable, missionary-invented garments for the women, that the store "boy" made up on an aged sewing-machine.

Davida lit a cigarette in the vain hope that it would discourage the flies.

Archie and Miriam began to play some childish game which consisted of writing with their fingers in the sand. Whatever they wrote seemed to amuse them enormously and they giggled, with their heads close together. Davida looked out over the bare red ground that stretched away from the store, and wondered how anyone could bear



to live there. The nearest trees were in the distant line of bush . . . the river flowed sluggishly between steep banks . . . the store, butchery and meeting-house, all with roofs of corrugated iron, sweltered in the heat. Old Barneveldt's wagon lumbered towards the store from the other side of the river; it clattered down the steep drift and disappeared, only the curses of the driver and the splash and commotion of the floundering oxen gave assurance that it had not been swallowed up by the earth. By and by it reappeared and drew up by the horses and mules, drops of water glistening on the wheel spokes and axles like diamonds. Its driver threw down his whip with a swagger, and squatted down by the other natives. Pigeons walked on the roof of the store, slipping and slithering . . . and all the cloudless blue sky stared down. It seemed as if everything were standing still . . . as if it had always been just like that and would be so through all eternity. And Davida, drowsy and apathetic, did not mind much if it did, if she spent eternity drowsing under the empty sky.

The farmers came out of the meeting, exchanged a few words, saddled up, inspanned, and went away, the sound of their farewells breaking the dreamlike feeling.

Charles came out with the Maynes.

Mrs. Mayne, small and slender, and gentle in manner, wearing a topee with a green veil floating around it, walked ahead of her husband and came up to Davida.

"Your husband has just said that you will both lunch with us," she said.

Davida thrust her book into her pocket and stood up.

"How tiresome of Charles," she thought, "he knew quite well that I wanted to ride on to the Templemans'."

She inwardly decided to stop at the Templemans' anyway, even if they were late. If Charles had anything important to do, he could go straight home without her. Certain things, thoughts, worried her like persistent gnats, buzzing into her mind at unexpected moments. Oliver Templeman for instance . . . and Barry. And an insistent wonder what made Mrs. Mayne, an otherwise kindly and gentle woman, so very adamant as regarded Alice. It was all very absurd. Everything seemed out of proportion. What could Barry, for instance, do that was so very important?

Charles was observing Miriam and Archie with blue, sardonic eyes. He was standing as usual with one hand on his hip and sjambok dangling. The sjambok seemed part of his attire, he was never without it. Miriam looked at him with patent admiration, and Davida noticed how tall and lithe and romantic he looked.

Mr. Mayne, stolid, compact and sandy-haired, with prominent grey eyes and a fussy, magisterial manner, began to hurry them along.

"Come along, come along . . . we'll take the car and go along to the Kurumidzi drift for lunch . . . can't stay here . . . too hot."

Davida caught his ill-disguised disapproval of the Sylvesters, who were making merry with young Barneveldt and another young Dutchman. Marvellous to keep up

that peculiarly British snobbishness under the empty sky, and on the stretching, dusty veldt. He might have been a respectable rate-paying resident in a small town, looking at a party of trippers who had started to picnic outside his garden gate.

A spasm of sheer nervous irritation shook Davida.

Charles was aware of it. "Davida and I will ride down," he said. "We don't want to crowd you out."

As they passed the Sylvesters, Eileen drew away from young Barneveldt, who was leaning towards her, flushed, and called out: "Oh, aren't you going to picnic here?"

Davida shook her head. Charles took no notice and walked on.

"Charles," said Davida, "why did you say we'd lunch with the Maynes? I don't think it's good enough, myself."

"Why not?" he asked.

But she was not to be put off this time by his air of non-comprehension.

"You know why not," she said.

He glanced down at her with an amused smile.

"I'm not fighting Alice's battles . . . and in any case, this isn't a very dignified one. I prefer to be oblivious of Archie and his love-affairs, and I'm not going to admit that Alice has a grievance."

"There don't seem to be many battles that you are willing to fight," observed Davida, resentfully. "There are one or two that you might think about."

His whole manner stiffened.

"I won't lunch with them, anyway," said Davida passionately.

Charles appeared bored.

"Don't be childish, Davida."

"I won't lunch with them, it's letting us all down. . . ."

"Alice has let herself down. . . ."

"Helped by your father!"

He swung himself into the saddle.

"What shall I say to the Maynes?"

"Anything you like!"

She mounted her own horse and turned towards the home track. Tears smarted at the back of her eyes. What a beastly business! What a stupid quarrel! But to lunch with the Maynes seemed like siding with them against Alice, agreeing with them. . . .

Reasonably, perhaps, it was stupid. It would not help Alice. It would not alter matters. It would only do herself harm . . . she liked to ride over to the Maynes occasionally.

Davida believed in reason . . . strove to live by it . . . but now she was swamped by a sudden unthinking loyalty.

Ahead of her the line of bush shimmered in the heat, the track, rutted by wagon-wheels, wound towards it. Her mouth hardened. She put spurs to her horse and cantered away.

When she looked back Charles was riding after the Maynes, down to the Kurumidzi drift.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### I

WHEN Davida rode home the sun had already sunk, and bushes and boulders seemed no longer just bushes and boulders, but crouching animals. They seemed to move imperceptibly, to shift slightly as one looked away from them and then looked back. A streak of lemon light still glowed in the west, sickly against the steely sky. The evening had come in melancholy mood, spreading her sombre draperies wearily over the dead day. A jackal was outlined for a minute on the rising ground near the home *vlei*, scurrying nervously away from an unwanted prominence.

Once her horse shied and tried to bolt, and she pulled him in with a beating heart. Her nerves were certainly rocky . . . quarrelling with Charles had a horrible effect.

She came into the home *vlei*. The lights of the house were little orange lanterns in emptiness. The pale moon climbed listlessly into the sky . . . the kopje crouched darkly against the skyline, and the house glimmered, huddled in the silence.

She began to sing "Ach du lieber Augustin," and urged on her horse. Charles and his father, talking on

the stoep, heard her and paused. The Old Man tugged gently at his beard, his eyes contemplative.

She came on to the veranda and saw Charles and the Old Man. It gave her a queer, uneasy feeling. They were . . . they were . . . what was the word? . . . a secretive sort of word . . . *closeted* . . . that was the impression. She was still humming, but suddenly she bit her lip.

Charles said nothing. He knocked the ash of his cigarette on to the floor, and continued speaking: "Of course, Mayne means no harm . . . but Barry's got his knife into Templeman."

The Old Man didn't answer, but perceptibly indicated Davida to his son.

There was a pause.

Davida strolled over, picked up a cigarette from the box on the table, leant against a veranda pillar and looked down at them.

"Did Mayne say anything at the meeting, Charles?" she asked.

"No . . . I was talking to him at lunch."

"Oh well," she said casually, "I hope you told him that Barry is a scorpion."

Without waiting for an answer she went away to change.

## II

The two candles on either side of the mirror wavered and flickered in the draught from the window. Davida

stared at herself in the glass . . . her eyes were sombre and her lips pale, a frown creased her forehead.

Somehow to-night she couldn't rally, couldn't bring up those reserves of philosophical detachment. When it came to Charles she couldn't feel detached. He was too close to her, too essential. Even when they quarrelled there was a sense of unreality . . . it was like an angry wind ruffling the surface of a deep pool . . . the wind subsided and no trace was left. But this was different. It was as if Charles was definitely deserting her, definitely going over to his father. If he did that life would be too grim. The household impossible! He had many of his father's mannerisms . . . she could not contemplate his developing his father's nature. She could *not* understand him in some things. There must be something more than mere filial affection that made him acquiesce in the Old Man's behaviour. How could he countenance it, if he didn't, in his heart of hearts, sympathize with it?

A chill shiver ran through her.

By and by she pulled on a dull green frock, that she had not worn for months, a tight-bodiced frock with a full skirt. She brushed her hair vigorously, almost violently, and fished out of a drawer an almost forgotten stick of lip rouge. It was as if she wanted to fight against defeat, to keep up her courage by interest in clothes, in small things . . . to fight against that insidious rot, general slackness and indifference. One might sink so



easily into a weary acquiescence, a mindless resignation, become drab and slovenly and forlorn, like some women she had seen on farms. And she would not have even the anodyne of work . . . they worked like mules . . . she had nothing to do.

She went into the living-room and sat down in front of the fire. Charles and the Old Man were still talking on the veranda, their voices mingling into a low monotone. Davida caught the word "Templeman," and a chuckle from the Old Man.

Lydia had been particularly cheerful in the afternoon, more amused than anything about the straying cattle. Oliver had been down with a slight touch of fever, and hadn't been using the oxen. "After all," Lydia had said, "they only ate some of his grass; they didn't trample crops or anything. I'll send a 'boy' over to collect them . . . I didn't even know they had gone."

There was no sign of Alice. Surely Charles hadn't told her about Archie . . . though if he had told the Old Man, Alice was certain to be informed. Just how far was Alice in love . . . or did she simply cling to Archie as her one hope of getting away from the farm she hated?

When Charles sauntered in Davida was leaning forward, elbows on knees, chin resting in cupped hands, gazing into the fire.

She looked up and groped on the small table by her side for a cigarette.

"Listen," she said, "what did Mayne say about Oliver's oxen?"

She sat up very straight, a crimson flame in her cheeks.

"You might have tried to stop him," she flared, "you know how broke they are . . . that'll be sixteen pounds Oliver will have to pay."

"He shouldn't be so damn casual. You can't farm and daydream . . . that, sweet Davida, is why I so seldom give way to my secret passion for verse."

"It's fortunate for you," she said, "that you are so well able to conquer your weaknesses."

He laughed abruptly and sat down, stretching out his feet to the fire. He looked withdrawn and tired, his mouth twisted to one side. He was quite unapproachable. She could not tell what he was thinking, whether he was merely annoyed . . . or unhappy. He would never tell her. He expected her to know.

She remembered her imaginings when she first met him. Life was to be an idyll . . . simple and poetic. Everything nice and clean and tidy, nice clean cows and pigs, gleaming horses, golden corn, blue skies and hot sun, and Charles walking about like a gentleman farmer in England, looking immaculate, and poking the pigs in the ribs with a stick. He certainly did look immaculate whenever he could, but there was always sweat and tractor oil and cows with unpleasant sores to be doctored, and details about ticks and worms, and natives with repulsive knobs growing where no knobs should be . . .

and native women turning up and wanting iodine, and their diseases diagnosed (Charles gave them bottles of water and they went happily away) . . . and that beastly old gentleman on the veranda.

She had expected that they would have the same friends and the same interests, but he was not keen on the Templemans, or anybody for that matter . . . and though she had been anxious to take an interest in farming, he had shown plainly that he didn't want her to be interested in it. He had a genius for solitude. He did not care whether anyone came to the homestead or not, and she seldom cared to invite people, because it was always dubious how the Old Man would behave. If anything Charles appeared to like the Sylvester *ménage* more than any other . . . a queer taste when you came to think about it. You would 'have thought that Mrs. Sylvester would put him off.

"And," thought Davida angrily, "it isn't enough to go round looking moodily handsome . . . not if your companion has some slight degree of intelligence."

"Look here," said Charles suddenly, "you can't go through this world looking after the Oliver Templemans. That, in this particular case, is Lydia's job, and she seems to me eminently capable of doing it."

"I think it's a horrible idea that you can't ever do your friends a good turn."

"You can't run their lives for them," said Charles conclusively.

"Do you intend to follow up these charming and indifferent sentiments as regards myself?" inquired Davida.

He was idly swinging his sjambok, and watching the snake-like thing slur along the floor. He paused and raised one eyebrow.

"As how?" he murmured.

"I mean generally . . . the wheat in particular."

"Is that wheat so terribly particular? We shan't go broke if it isn't grown, you know!"

"No, we shan't go broke . . . I wish to goodness there was a chance that we should, then perhaps we should be on our own."

"It would be great fun supporting Alice," he murmured, "not to mention the fact that if we were broke we should not have a place of our own."

Davida made a helpless gesture. She would not appeal to him, try and play on his feelings for her, insist that she could not bear life as it was. If he couldn't see for himself how unfair it was, there was nothing to be gained by pointing it out. It was one of those things that could not be pointed out.

Mac padded to the door and announced dinner.

The Old Man came in ponderously.

He looked around. "Is Alice not dining to-night?" he asked.

Nobody answered, and he sent Mac to inquire. They waited in silence until he returned.

But Alice sent a message to say that she did not want dinner, she was not well.

## III

After coffee Davida went to Alice's room. She knocked and heard Alice's voice, choked and muffled: "Go away!" Davida opened the door and went in.

Alice was lying huddled up in bed, her eyes red, and her lips swollen and dry. She appeared to have cried herself into a state of exhaustion.

The moon, high now, flung a javelin of light through the carelessly drawn curtains, and the room was uncomfortable and untidy. Davida, who seldom went into Alice's room, stumbled over a chair which stood incongruously in the middle of it. She damned it amiably, and went over to the dressing-table, where she fumbled among a litter of oddments for matches, found them, and lit the lamp.

The bed was horribly muddled, and the room undusted, with clothes strewn over the chairs.

"My dear," said Davida, "why on earth have you let the houseboy get so slack?"

Alice sat up in bed.

"I don't let him do my room," she said in a curious tone, half-defiant, half-scornful, and consciously superior.

"Why on earth not?"

"Because I think it's the limit—white women letting black 'boys' do their bedrooms."

Davida made a funny little face. This was new. A

fortnight ago Alice had been quite content to have the houseboy do her room. In fact, a fortnight ago Davida would have said that nothing on earth would have induced Alice to attempt to do her room . . . she was much too lazy.

However. . . !

"Oh, well, of course, that's just as you like, but in that case, Alice, I should at least endeavour to keep it as decently as the despised 'boy' would."

"It's not funny."

Now whose idea was it, that bedroom one? There were one or two people whom Davida knew to have it, but they were not the sort of people to whom Alice would have paid any attention. Oh, yes . . . Mrs. Mayne! Archie had said that his mother always did her own room, and had appeared to agree with it. Poor little idiot of an Alice!

"Listen, Alice—what's the matter?"

Alice's eyes became vague and evasive.

"Nothing."

"Well, why no dinner?"

"I felt ill."

"Shall I take your temperature?"

"No, thanks."

"All right. Then I'd better tell your father that you're really ill."

"You're not to tell him, Davida."

"There must be something the matter, Alice, and if

you won't tell me, I shall tell Charles that you are suffering from some mysterious ailment."

"He'd be pleased. He hates me, and so does father."

"Idiot!" said Davida tersely.

"Well, they do, you know they do. They're pleased when anything goes wrong with me. They're pleased that Archie hasn't been near here, and now he's at the meeting with another girl. Well, I don't care," her fingers fidgeted with the blanket, "I shall do something one day that will surprise them . . . they'll be sorry some day."

Her face was blotched with crying. Davida wished vehemently that she could feel sorry for her, but all she felt was irritation.

"Listen," she said, "suppose I suggest to Charles that we go to Salisbury for a day or two for a change. . . ."

"I don't want to go anywhere. Wherever I go it's the same . . . people talk."

"Oh, what does it matter if they do? They talk about everyone. And look here, Alice, don't be so morbid. If it were true that Charles and your father hated you, it wouldn't hurt them whatever you did. It might hurt you a lot, though. But it isn't true. It's only that you are so fearfully introspective. You only see your side of a thing, never anybody else's. That's the trouble. You can't see that anyone else has anything to bother them, and you wouldn't care so long as everyone gave in to you, and you got what you wanted."



Another vicious circle. . . .

"Alice, for Heaven's sake get out of bed and let me make it for you, and then you'd better take two aspirins and go to sleep; and to-morrow you'd better overcome your scruples about the 'boy' for once, and let him turn the room out. In any case, I don't think Mrs. Mayne objects to him turning out the room; it was simply making the bed."

"I wasn't thinking of Mrs. Mayne."

She got up and bathed her face, while Davida remade her bed. When she got back again and took the aspirin she looked slightly ashamed.

"I would like to come to Salisbury. . . ."

"All right, I'll ask Charles. Cheer up and go to sleep."

Davida went out of the house at the back, and stared up at the white moon. What a night! It would be marvellous down at the wheat *vlei*. Lovely the land looked in that clear, cold light. How furious the old baboon would be . . . disturbing his amusements like that! She must do it. She must!

The back door swung open and clanged back. Charles came out. He came and stood beside her with his hands thrust into his pockets. In the moonlight his face was strange and white, different . . . younger. Or was it the moon that affected her, and made him look younger to her? The moon was like that. Even the most self-dependent man seemed to need comforting: even the most loathsome man aroused a gleam of pity. The moon, high magical queen, made one feel one's littleness. Man

was but a dot as he gazed reverentially at her scarred face.

"Coming in?" he said at length.

"I suppose so . . . Charles, I've been thinking . . . let's plough the wheat 'lands' by moonlight."

"My dear child, when do I go to bed?"

"Well, I could do it myself."

"Don't be a little ass."

"But I could . . . what do you think would happen to me?"

"Well, for one thing you would be miles from the house, and all alone with two natives."

"What of it? I've got a revolver, anyway."

"It's impossible. It can't be done."

She turned round slowly and put her hand upon his arm.

"It's going to be done, Charles . . . I've got to do it. I'll do it if I have to borrow Oliver's oxen."

"He can't move his oxen on to my land without a permit."

"Well, who would know?"

"Barry would."

"Not unless you told him."

He ignored it.

"The natives talk."

Her hand dropped from his arm, and she began to walk back to the house.

"Davida . . . look here . . . if you promise not to

do it without me I'll try and manage it. The mealies are nearly through."

She hesitated.

"All right," she said listlessly.

They went in together.

Old Bruce was still sitting by the fire smoking. He had, thought Davida disgustedly, the expression of bland satisfaction that characterized the cat that swallowed the canary.

## CHAPTER SIX

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### I

THERE was for the moment a hiatus in life. Nothing seemed to happen. The Old Man was ill; nothing much, but it kept him to his own room, and he wanted nothing that Mac and Charles could not do for him. As always when he was at all off-colour, he read the Bible: not, he explained, for any religious consolation, but because the Old Testament appealed to him. It had colour and sense, and none of the modern squeamishness. He had been known to say to scandalized listeners that the modern sex novel was dull compared with the Old Testament, and not half so well written.

Davida had seized the opportunity to get on with the ploughing. The Old Man had sent M'Shebi back to his kraal for a week or so, on the pretext that he looked ill, a solicitude for the well-being of the "boy" hitherto admirably concealed: so Davida went down and ploughed herself, walking behind the plough until she was wet and sticky with heat, finding that she could do longer and longer stretches at a time. It was an excellent sedative to an over-active mind, and as a result she did not greatly worry what Alice and Charles were doing. She did notice, however, that Charles was nervy and irritable.

Archie had not been to see them for weeks and Alice had been singularly unconversational about it. So far as Davida knew, she moped about the house all day, or lay in the hammock and read Davida's books. Charles presumably spent his time down on the mealie "lands," which were nearly finished. They all knew each other's occupations so well that there was no interest in inquiring about them. She knew, from a remark dropped casually by Charles, that Oliver had paid his fine and got his oxen out of the pound, but owing to the ploughing she had not moved off the farm, nor seen the Templemans, and she was too physically tired at the end of the day to miss them. There would be time enough when the rains broke for heart-searchings, and it was a thing to be thankful for that if one worked one's body hard enough, one's mind lay fallow.

## II

The calm did not continue. Davida, riding lazily homewards through a glowing sunset, tired and yet full of a physical well-being, heard, as she neared the homestead, loud outcries and the stamping and shuffling of an excited horse. Instinctively she hurried. As she came round the corner of the stable and in view of the house she had time to think how lovely an evening it was, with the shadows of the gum trees falling across that thatched house, and the golden light of the setting sun. She slipped off her horse, rather hazy, her mind still full of the beauty,

her eyes seeing, but her brain not realizing, the significance of the Old Man holding in a sweating, frightened horse, while he shouted hoarsely at Alice, who stood with her back to the wall, her body pressed against it as if she wanted to melt into it and vanish entirely.

"Little wanton . . . Jezebel . . . meeting your rustic lover in the bush, hiding about behind ant-heaps. . . ."

He urged the horse towards her, his arm raised. Alice screamed and pressed frantically against the wall.

Suddenly with a click Davida's brain came into partnership with her eyes again, and she ran forward. One or two natives were standing by, their eyes wide and their mouths set in uncertain grins. The Inkoos was undoubtedly mad . . . and it was no business of theirs what he did to the young Inkoosigaas.

The Old Man glared at Davida with suffused eyes.

"Ask her where she's been," he snarled, pointing at Alice. "Ask her how she spends her time now that Mayne's thrown her over. Little slut. . . ."

Davida caught hold of Alice, swung her clear of the plunging horse and, still holding her, walked with as much dignity as possible into the house. There, with the comforting click of the closing door behind her, she let go of Alice and shakily lit a cigarette.

Alice, for once too frightened to cry, remained stonily silent.

"Too bad," said Davida at last, "what had you been doing?"

Alice, whose face was a suety white, did not answer.

"You might as well tell me," said Davida reasonably, "because he'll be in in a minute!"

But at that moment the thunder of flying hoofs proclaimed the Old Man's rapid departure. Davida went to the veranda and watched him gallop down the road, rocking and swaying until she wondered, quite dispassionately, that he remained in the saddle.

"Where's Charles?" she asked.

Alice's eyes brightened into faint malice.

"At the Sylvesters'," she said in tones pregnant with meaning.

"Oh . . ." Davida's voice was reflective, her eyes unruffled.

"He's often there," added Alice, becoming more composed. "Almost as often as you used to go to the Templemans'."

Davida ignored it.

"Well," she said, "I think he ought to go after his father. This is the first time the Old Man's started off in the evening."

Colour was returning to Alice's face in blotches. She was also showing signs of being about to weep. She began to heave and her mouth trembled, and then, with a few preliminary chokes, she broke into sobs.

"Oh, what *is* the good of crying," said Davida impatiently. "You won't tell me what it was all about."

"It wasn't anything . . . he's got a horrible mind. And he's no right to call me the things he did . . . and in front of the kaffirs."



"They don't understand his ripe old English," observed Davida dryly, and she turned to go to her own room. But her conscience (the possession of which she very much resented) began to work, and she turned back. She could not help feeling some sort of responsibility for Alice, since Alice lived in the same house and was, when all was said and done, a miserable object. And though at intervals Davida argued calmly and reasonably to herself that really it was absurd, she could not be expected to look after Alice, pity and her tiresome conscience always defeated her. She wondered now whether her own pre-occupation had anything to do with this business. If she did not take some notice of Alice, nobody else would . . . certainly not Charles.

"Look here, Alice," she said, "what have you been doing? You might as well tell me . . . I shall hear it from Charles or your father."

But Alice merely sobbed more convulsively and rushed away to her bedroom. And there she would remain, Davida knew, until someone (and it would not be her brother or her father) went through the tiring business of persuading her to come out and be sensible.

For the moment, at any rate, there was nothing to be done. Alice must weep alone, if weep she would. . . . For the moment even ploughing seemed futile . . . the vast silent land was desolate and frightening. The sun was almost gone, leaving jagged streaks of red in a dull grey sky. Why weren't there any dogs about the place? Dogs were companionable things. And that was a dis-

turbing thought! Why should she think of dogs as the only companionable things, as if, in her inmost thoughts, she did not find Charles companionable?

She stood still thinking, one hand pressed against her throat and her eyes unseeing.

And why should Charles go to the Sylvesters'? Did he find something about them that was more companionable, more congenial than herself? It might be. There had been times, she told herself with a fierce honesty, when she had found the Templemans more companionable than Charles; had, even while she was first married, found with them more points of contact than with Charles. She had put it down to the Old Man and Alice, deciding, when she did think about it, that if she were living alone with Charles, it would be different; they would regain that warm happiness that had been theirs in England and on the ship, and in the Cape and in Salisbury, and that had only died away when they got down to the farm. But now, perhaps, Charles found something about the Sylvesters that she could not see, as she found something about the Templemans that he could not see.

Suddenly she was horribly lonely, with a loneliness that had nothing to do with the solitude, the emptiness; she was lonely with the loneliness that is the same in crowds, among friends, among families, an inward loneliness . . . a mental loneliness. For if she and Charles walked along different paths mentally, what were they to do? For somehow she could not contemplate life without him. It was as if they had some fundamental, some

occult sympathy that held them together, but was so deep, so occult, that it helped them not at all to make life easy together.

Had they, she asked herself with a hurting, difficult honesty, been carried away on the gleaming, warm tide of passion when they first met—to be stranded now, alien and lonely, on the cold shore of matrimony?

She turned abruptly and went along to her bedroom, her small face looking rather drawn and pale.

### III

It was half-past seven before Charles came in. Davida was still in her bedroom, sitting in front of the dressing-table and brushing her hair. She said nothing about the Sylvesters, hoping against hope that he would mention them. Eileen's face danced before her dreaming eyes. But he said nothing. He came up behind her and stood with hands resting on her shoulders, bent as if to kiss her; but she did not move and he stopped and turned away.

She put down her brush and called to him.

"I say, Charles!"

"Yes?"

He was sitting on the edge of his bed, knees apart, sjambok dangling between them.

"Your father has just driven away drunk, after threatening Alice in front of the natives."

He didn't answer.

"Charles! . . . you might say something."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What is there to say?"

"I don't know what it was all about," she said slowly.

"Don't you?"

She looked over her shoulder and saw that he was smiling a queer, unhappy smile.

"I should imagine," he added, "that he saw her walking about like Love's young dream with Piet Barneveldt in the bush!"

"But, Charles!" she said in amazement.

"Haven't you seen that pleased 'done you this time' air that has enveloped her for the last week? And the fact that she's taken to riding out every day? I've seen her several times. . . ."

"But . . ." she stood up and began to walk about the room, "why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't think it of vast interest."

She stifled an impulse to retort: "I suppose your visits to the Sylvesters are on the same plane." Instead she said: "You should have told me. You know what an idiot Alice is . . . anything might happen. Barneveldt is quite a decent boy . . . but . . ."

Charles frowned at his sjambok.

"She wants a damn good hiding," he said briefly.

He stood up and went towards their dressing-room.

"I may have to go out after dinner, so I shan't change."

Davida hesitated. Tears, to her angry surprise, were

pricking the backs of her eyes. She went along to Alice's room and found her bathing her eyes with cold water and getting ready for dinner.

"Look here," she demanded, "why didn't you tell me you were friendly with Piet Barneveldt?"

The muscles of Alice's face quivered and she blushed.

"It's nobody's business," she answered. "Anyway, why should everybody make a fuss about it? It's not a crime to meet anybody out riding."

"No . . . but then, why not mention it? It looks as if you were ashamed of it."

Alice stamped pettishly.

"Oh, good Heavens! I'm not in the least interested in the idiot. But I suppose I can be polite if I meet him? In any case . . ." she swung round defiantly, "I'm engaged to Archie!"

Davida raised politely disbelieving eyebrows.

"I am," said Alice, "you needn't look like that. We're not telling anyone just now, because he's got to get round his family . . . you know, he hasn't any money if he quarrels with his family. . . ."

Davida frowned slightly. Alice began to knot her handkerchief nervously.

"It *is* true, Davida . . . really. But please don't tell anyone. It might spoil everything, and you don't know what it means to me. I should kill myself . . . I've been so unhappy . . . please don't tell Charles—or *anybody*."

"But, Alice," objected Davida, "I don't think you ought to be engaged to him on such terms. It's so beastly

insulting. It puts you in such a false position, and besides he hasn't been here for ages!"

"Yes," said Alice eagerly, "but I've been meeting him on the veldt. You know what it's like here with father. . . . Listen, I'll tell him I've told you, if only you'll promise not to say anything."

"Well, you've got to stop meeting young Barneveldt . . ." said Davida irresolutely.

"All right . . . I won't even speak to him. Honestly! Oh, Davida, you are a darling!"

She gave a gasp of relief, and to Davida's horror fell upon her and kissed her.

#### I V

After dinner Charles stood up, yawned, and said he supposed he'd better go and see what had happened to the Old Man. "It may take half the night," he added.

His hand rested, as if by accident, on Davida's shoulder, and she put her hand over it. He looked down at her wearily.

"By the way," he said, "did you know that they've sloshed Templeman the maximum fine for having tick-infested cattle? Barry piled it on thick about general slackness . . . menace to the district and what not. But cheer up . . . if they want any help, I'll see what I can do."

"That pig Barry," said Davida. "I ought to have been

over to see Lydia, but somehow I've been so busy. I'll go to-morrow!"

Alice, who was sitting listlessly by the fire, stiffened.

"Listen!" she exclaimed.

Davida saw her face redden and then go white as paper.

"What's the matter?" said Charles.

"I heard a car."

They all listened and they all thought the same thing. Mayne owned the only car in the district. Instinctively they braced themselves for bad news.

"Nonsense," said Charles edgily, and went out on to the veranda.

Thrusting through the night were two spears of light, turning and twisting as the car came along the uneven, winding track.

"What the devil . . .?" muttered Charles.

"I suppose there's been an accident," said Davida, and she slipped her arm through his elbow.

Alice came out behind her and stood watching the lights coming nearer. She said nothing. She felt sick with a premonition of disaster. She was sure, quite sure, that there had been no serious accident to her father. . . . *He* was all right. But she knew instinctively that something had happened that would be a catastrophe for her.

The car turned in the drive and drew up by the house.

Charles went towards it and Davida made a move to follow him, but Alice caught her wrist agitatedly.



"Oh, don't go," she said in a thin whisper, "don't go. . . ."

They heard Mr. Mayne's voice and Archie's lighter tenor.

"Davida," called Charles, "get Mac and tell him to take a lamp along to father's room and hot water and towels."

"All right," said Davida, and pulled her wrist away from Alice's feverish grasp. She left her standing on the veranda, one hand pressed against her heart in a kind of still despair.

Charles and Archie went past, carrying the Old Man. Mr. Mayne fussed after them. By and by, he came back and was going to the car, when Alice moved and in a stiff voice asked him to come in.

"Ah, thank you, Miss Bruce, thank you . . . but we must be getting back."

She knew by the sound of his voice that something more than an accident had happened. It was unfriendly, irritable.

In her despair, she persisted: "But Archie isn't here yet."

"Archie will be along in a moment . . . as soon as your father is settled."

She felt a kind of panic. Archie would drive away, back to his comfortable existence, back to his friends, and she would be left behind. She would never see him again . . . never, never, never!

"Oh, *what* happened?" she wailed.

He was in a dinner jacket. In the luminous light she could see him, stiff and magisterial, belonging to another world, the quiet, ordinary, conventional world; the world to which she longed so desperately to belong. To belong to the Maynes' world spelt safety to her. It seemed a protection against the vague fears and impulses that beset her. Charles and Davida belonged . . . life on the farm didn't make them outside it; but she was, somehow, outside. They pushed her out, coldly and politely. They didn't like her. But Archie had liked her . . . Archie. . . .

Mr. Mayne fussed with his tie and coughed.

"Oh—er—your father was thrown from his horse . . . just near our house . . . nothing serious!"

She could have stamped and screamed and wept, beaten her head against a wall. What had the old beast been doing there . . . what had he said? What did she care if it were serious or not? She wished that he were dead . . . dead, dead, dead, and could never do her any more harm.

Mr. Mayne saw her eyes glittering and wild, and retreated nervously.

Someone came out of the Old Man's room . . . two people . . . Archie and Davida! They strolled over to the veranda, talking cheerfully.

The rim of the moon looked over the horizon and gave a pale radiance to the night.

"We've let Charles fix him up," said Davida carelessly. "It was very good of you to take all that trouble

. . . and very lucky for him that he happened to be near your place. . . .”

Alice gave an hysterical, sobbing laugh.

Archie did not look at her. He stood with his hands in his pockets and watched his toe drawing patterns in the sand. He wore dancing pumps. Alice caught her breath and became silent.

Mr. Mayne coughed again.

“Well, come along, Archie,” he said, “your mother will be waiting for us!”

Davida fell into step by his side and walked towards the car.

“Archie!” said Alice urgently.

Mr. Mayne hesitated, looked over his shoulder, and walked on.

“Yes,” said Archie wretchedly.

“Archie . . . what did happen?”

“Oh, he . . . he fell off just in front of the veranda.”

“Did he—did he do anything—or say anything first?”

The nervous pleading in her voice embarrassed him, made him irritable.

“Yes,” he said in his father’s tone.

“What?” she asked unhappily.

Mr. Mayne blew the horn.

“I can’t stay, Alice . . . really . . . I’ll tell you some other time. I’ll try and get over some day . . . Er—good-bye. . . !”

He went hurriedly to the car and sat beside his father.

Davida said good-bye in her clear, cool voice.

Alice leaned against the veranda pillar. Archie would not come again! Even to her deliberately blind eyes, it was plain that everything was finished. He had fled to the car from an irksome situation and with relief.

Davida came back. She took Alice's arm and pressed it. "He's an old beast, Alice . . . we'll have to do something . . . try and cheer up."

As she steered the reluctant Alice into the warmth and glow of the living-room, she was thinking that just as she was on the verge of an understanding with Charles, this must happen. His loyalty to his father had flared up before the smug and disapproving looks of the Maynes. And now he would hide his own humiliation behind the appearance of indifference.

The moon climbed leisurely into the sky, shone over the still *vlei*, and made a lacy, delicate pattern on the track through the bush where Archie and his father drove silently home.

v

Charles and Davida sat up in front of the fire long after the Maynes had gone. Charles was frowning and moody, his thin face flushed and his eyes angry blue flames. He admitted that the Old Man was impossible, he even admitted that it was rather hard on Alice, and having admitted it, he stubbornly refused to admit that there was any remedy.

"I can't leave the Old Man. That's all there is to it. . . ."

"I'm beginning to suffer from Alice's complex, you know," said Davida thoughtfully. "I don't feel that I want to meet the Maynes again. But he's not just given to suddenly going over the deep end and getting tight . . . there's more to it. When he does it, he does it with a purpose. It's not just weakness. He went to the Maynes' on purpose . . . it wasn't that he didn't know what he was doing . . . it's rather frightening."

Charles looked at her with raised eyebrows, and then shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"What do you want to do?" he asked. "Can't you stick it out for my sake? Or is it Alice that you care most about. . . . Or do you want to clear out and go home?"

She stood up and lit a cigarette. Her hand shook, she was shaken altogether with a strange excitement. It was as if he had opened a door that she had not known was there . . . of course . . . she could always go home to England.

"It's a dangerous remedy, separation," she said. "At the end of six months I might not want to come back . . . you never know!"

"If you went," he answered, "you would never come back. . . ."

"You'd rather have that happen," she said bitterly, "than do the only decent thing—give up the farm and live on your own. I've told you I'll start with you. If you have to take a job, I'll go with you. But you'd rather

lose me than the farm . . . rather leave me than your father, who does not deserve to have decent people living with him. . . .”

He stood up and leant against the mantelpiece.

“I suppose that’s what you really believe,” he said, “it’s obviously the way it would appeal to an impartial outsider. But you’re not an outsider. . . . But let it go . . . my reasons for not leaving him are, I should have thought, fairly understandable to you . . . anyway, I won’t leave him!”

“But, Charles. . . .”

He did not move, and she made a small gesture of despair. If only he would kiss her, hold her . . . beg her to stay with him . . . at least, then she would feel sure he loved her. . . . But he said nothing . . . and the long minutes ticked away.

She tried to understand . . . what distorted sense of duty could lead him to sacrifice her and their marriage? She would never have accused him of sentimentality. She had always found him singularly sane and unsentimental on the subject of family ties. The Old Man might make appeals to him in private that were at variance with the bland complacency that he showed the world . . . but there again she would not have thought Charles the person to succumb to sentimental appeals from aged parents that were not based on sound grounds and backed up by some sense of decency on the part of the parent. Surely Charles could say: “If we stay, you must behave decently?”

"Let's go to bed," she said wearily.

"Do you want to go home?" he asked colourlessly.

"I don't know . . . it's too important to decide when one is tired. . . ."

And suddenly he smiled and caught hold of her.

"Oh, Davida . . . don't go . . . don't go . . . try and understand!"

## VI

Next morning, while Charles was down with the tractor, Davida told a pale and heavy-eyed Alice exactly what the Old Man had done at the Maynes' place.

And Alice, sitting on the veranda in the warm peace of the morning, twisting her handkerchief, saw it all too plainly. The Maynes sitting after dinner, sedate and happy in their very English drawing-room. And through the quiet night the first sounds of the Old Man's approach. Hoarse and bawdy singing and the thud of a galloping horse. They would pretend not to hear. There had been guests there, girls from Salisbury and one or two young men in the Civil Service. The people she wanted to know and like her. And then, when it could no longer be ignored, Mr. Mayne, going out with Archie, and the Old Man, dishevelled and ribald, his eyes glazed, rocking in the saddle and laughing and shouting how his daughter spent the days in the bush with a damned young Boer . . . bussing and hugging him like any housemaid. Mr. Mayne telling him in clipped and pre-



cise accents to go away, and the Old Man hiccupping laughter. Archie stepping to the horse's head, the Old Man's sjambok coming down on his arm, the rearing of the frightened animal, and the Old Man toppling into a sprawling heap on the ground.

"Well, that's the end of that," said Alice, in a voice that tried hard to be casual and debonair.

And it was the end. Archie did not come the next day, nor any other day.

The Old Man stayed in his own quarters, and Charles walked about bad-temperedly. He did some ploughing for the wheat . . . but Davida was, for the moment, too dispirited to care.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

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FOR two or three days after the Maynes had brought the Old Man home, Davida was too preoccupied to think about the Templemans, and it was with a slight shock that she remembered that Oliver had been fined.

She was sitting on the veranda, turning over the pages of a book and thinking worriedly about Charles's suggestion that she should go home for a time. It was a certainty that, whatever happened, Charles would stay on the farm. And if that were so and things went on as they were at present, there seemed no alternative. One simply could not go on living in this way. The Old Man was getting worse. At times he seemed positively malign, and in time she would find it impossible to shake off the homestead atmosphere and ride off to see other people. Alice's complex would "get her" as she had pointed out to Charles the other night. And yet . . . she didn't want to go. And there was Alice! Although it was unreasonable, Alice had assumed the proportions of a responsibility.

She threw down the book and lit a cigarette. Why the devil should she let that old fiend spoil her life? Probably he would be pleased if she went. She had the idea

that he wanted Charles all to himself, that she was in the way. And if she went, wouldn't she ever come back? Did one come back in such circumstances . . . didn't one drift and drift . . . and let it go?

The weather was racing on towards the rains. Hot dreamy days with the *vleis* lying drowsy and clear against the sky and the humped ant-heaps brown and burnt. Already the leaves were changing colour, and the line of bush was gold and purple in the haze. It was hot enough to make one chary of riding during the day.

Suddenly she thought of the Templemans, and jumped up, remembering! Poor Lydia and Oliver . . . that brute Barry!

She pulled on a hat and went out to look for Charles. If the Templemans were in a bad hole, he'd have to do something, lend her some money for them, or something.

There was no sign of him round the homestead. He had said at breakfast what he was going to do. But she hadn't listened, the words had floated through her mind without leaving any imprint. Where *had* he gone? She didn't want to ride all round the farm before she started for the Templemans'.

The cookboy was leaning against the kitchen door, and Mac was ironing his coat on a table in the shade of a gum tree. A trail of blue smoke drifted up from the kitchen chimney. Chickens were pecking listlessly round the kitchen door, and a cloud of flies danced over some rubbish that was thrown by the side of the kitchen. She stopped instinctively to point out to the cookboy

the iniquity of not burning rubbish, and promising him unpleasant consequences if she saw it again. She heard Mac chuckle as she walked away, and a wave of hot blood flooded her cheeks. She was always conscious of a veiled impertinence from Mac and attributed it to the influence of the Old Man.

Alice was down by the stables, leaning over the half-door, talking to the horses. There was something forlorn about her. Ever since the other night she had been quiet and comparatively cheerful. She had made more effort to appear interested in the farm and house than she had ever done before . . . and now, in an effort to dispel the loneliness that she felt with Davida and Charles (and nothing could alter the fact that nothing Davida could do made a bond between them. There was no real affinity, they could say things to each other, but they could not talk . . .), she spent her time down by the stables, endeavouring to persuade herself that she really liked horses. She was not really fond of them, it was impossible for Alice to be really fond of anything; but for the time being it was comforting to pose as the friend of animals and find in their pure, perceptive affection, solace. Davida knew perfectly well that Alice would not go much farther than gushing over the horses when anyone was about to see her, kissing their soft noses and talking to them in a special, purring voice. She would not really work for them, or go riding to exercise them if she did not feel like it. She always tried not to think these things. She tried to take Alice as Alice wanted to

be taken, but she always failed. It was, she realized, that Alice raised in her a purely physical dislike, that she strove to justify by dwelling on Alice's too obvious faults. Now Lydia, whom she physically liked, had lots of faults, but she didn't notice them; instead, she saw with pleasure all Lydia's good points. She would have continued to like Lydia whatever she had done; she couldn't help liking her, any more than she could help that impalpable something that held her to Charles.

"Going out?" said Alice, who was striving to attain Davida's genuine indifference to what people did, and not to be jealous and hurt whenever anybody did anything without her.

"Yes," said Davida, "do you know where Charles is?"

"No. . . ."

Alice murmured another endearment to one of the horses and withdrew her head from the stable. She looked pale and there were mauve shadows under her eyes. Davida realized that she was probably deserving of sympathy, but when Alice went pale she became suety, and her face looked fat and she repelled and slaughtered the tiny sprout of sympathy that pushed tentatively upwards. It was no good. Davida tried to be fair, but she was always defeated by that physical dislike. "If I were one of those, whatever they call themselves, who see visions and things, I should probably say her aura was all wrong," she thought as she saddled up.

Alice had wandered aimlessly back to the house and

Davida wondered whether she, too, felt that constrained discomfort when they were together.

So Davida rode off through the hot morning and felt the relief of action. Charles was not down on the mealie "lands," which lay hot and red under the clear blue sky. He might be down by the wheat. . . . Unlikely! Not worth going down to see! She decided to go straight to the Templemans' and find out exactly how things were and to tackle Charles later.

She splashed through the sluggish rivulet that meandered through the *vlei* and that was nothing now but a thread of brown water between banks of ruddy dry mud and brown, shrivelled reeds, and went leisurely on her way. Her horse was quiet and cantered on comfortably, so that she could day-dream as she went. The yellow grass and the red track had a hypnotic effect and the horse knew his way. She came out of the bush into the Sylvesters' home *vlei* and ambled on. Mrs. Sylvester was sitting on the stoep and fanning herself with a paper. She waved at Davida. And then, round the corner of the house, with the Sylvester girl at his side, strolled Charles. Davida caught a glimpse of his face, saw annoyance written there, before she went on. The rest of the ride was a blur of confused emotions. She was angry and yet amused. Angry that Mrs. Sylvester should think that Charles went there without her knowledge (the old beast had looked so flustered) and amused that anyone should take the matter seriously. By the time she arrived at the Templemans', she was hot and cross.

Oliver was standing outside the living-hut, talking to Piet Barneveldt's father. The old Dutchman was sitting in a disreputable cape cart, as patriarchal as himself, talking very earnestly.

Davida hesitated and pulled in her horse, but the old Dutchman saw her and called out: "Mrs. Bruce, please. I should like that you talk to Mr. Templeman."

Oliver turned round, his face was haggard and white.

"Whatever is it, Oliver?" said Davida.

She rode up to the side of the cape cart. The Dutchman leaned forward.

"Mrs. Bruce, you are a friend of Mr. Templeman, I would that you would tell him to let me help him."

He was a dirty old man, stolid and bearded. He spoke bad English. He wore a battered and filthy felt hat, and his shirt proclaimed its permanent divorce from the washtub, but his blue eyes were very clear, and bright and honest.

Davida stared at Oliver.

"It's no good," he muttered, "it's awfully good of him. I don't want him to think I don't appreciate it . . . but . . . it's no good."

"See," said Barneveldt, "he helps me when that *schellum* Barry will have me fined or gaoled . . . I don't know what else. And now he will not take it that I pay for his fine. . . ."

"Look here," said Oliver, "I'd be damn glad to take it. But it's no good now. . . . Look here, Barneveldt . . . I'm in great trouble, it's not the fine. Be a



good fellow and leave me to tell Mrs. Bruce . . . and she will come over and explain to you. I'm very grateful. . . ."

He leant up and shook the Dutchman's hand.

Old Barneveldt gathered up his reins, his eyes clouded with concern.

"Well . . . it must be as you want. . . ."

"I'll ride over to-morrow, if I may," said Davida.

"Ja—ja——"

He cracked his whip and cried hoarsely to his mules. The cart started with a rumble and clatter and jolted off, leaving behind a cloud of red dust, luminous in the sunshine.

"Oliver?" said Davida.

She dismounted and he took her horse and called to the cookboy who was slouching about by the kitchen.

"What's the matter?" she said urgently, "is Lydia ill?"

He shook his head and motioned her into the hut, and in there he sat down in the rookie-chair, leaving the table to Davida, and buried his face in his hands.

He sat like that for some time, and when he looked up his brown eyes were sunken and the sun-wrinkles carved into deep lines.

"She's gone," he said.

"What . . . Lydia?"

"Yes."

He screwed up his eyes as if even the faint green light in the hut hurt them.

"She thought," he added in a flat hurt voice, "that it was best for me."

"But . . . she must be mad . . . Oliver, you must do something."

"It's too late . . . she managed too well. I never guessed. . . . She said she was going to Salisbury for the night, rode over to the Maynes' and got a lift in their car . . . and took the mail to the Cape. . . ."

He stared in front of him and his mouth twisted into a grimace of pain.

"She got the money from her husband . . ." he added.

Davida listened in a stunned horror. This desertion, this intolerable betrayal . . . it couldn't be true . . . not Lydia!

"Oliver," she exclaimed, "you're crazy . . . you don't know what you're saying. . . ."

"Yes . . . I do," he said wearily, "she wasn't married to me."

"But she can't have gone *now*," said Davida unhappily, "not *now* . . . just at this time. I don't believe it of Lydia."

He didn't seem to hear her.

"She's on the boat by now," he said in a monotonous voice, "she went five days ago . . . I didn't know until the evening after she had gone. Mayne sent her letter just about the time I was expecting her back. There's one for you. . . ."

He fumbled in his pocket and produced a crumpled envelope.

Davida opened it. Templeman sat with his face in his hands and didn't move while she read it.

"Davida, my dear, this is to say good-bye. I shall never see you again and I couldn't come over and say good-bye. Look after Oliver. He'll be terribly upset and he won't know what to do, but I'm sure after a little he will understand that it is the best. Make him do what I want him to do. Without me he can do so much more . . . he can go back to England and make it up with his family. They'll be quite pleased to see him without me, and now that we're absolutely ruined I don't see what else he can do. You see, I was never married to him. I was married to a very estimable man when I was very young. He was so estimable that he squeezed all the joy out of life and left nothing but a grey rag that smelt of cooking and grease and oilcloth and the sort of smell that hangs about a gas-stove. He had a religion also that he used to justify every mean little trick he played . . . but, anyway, I'm not writing this to excuse myself. *Je n'en vois pas la nécessité!* Well, I met Oliver, and it is a miracle that I did meet him, considering the sort of people I knew and the sort of people he knew. But I met him, and when he told me he loved me, there was nothing for it but to tell him I adored him. And I went away with him. We thought, of course, that my husband would take the first opportunity of ridding himself of such a person as me . . . but no! He wrote to me unc-

cuously. He pointed out that I had lost my immortal soul as well as my reputation, and that he, as a Christian man, was not going to allow me to get the State's condonation and live in legal sin. He said a lot more, but the gist of it was, that when I repented, or when my lover tired of me (as if my sweet Oliver was a seducer!) I could come back to his house because it was only Christian that he should take me back and endeavour to save my soiled soul. And I assure you that there was a threat there to make one blench: with what unction, what devilish pleasure he would save the soul of Oliver's discarded mistress! How sonorous are the phrases used by the unco guid to describe women who love! Well, there it is. I adore Oliver. I adore him. But he can do without me; he will find it easier after a little while. Much easier than if I had stayed. It's a fallacy that two people can live as cheaply as one. Twopence for a penny bus fare! And so I'm going back. It's the only way to make it final. I've told my husband. I've even got my fare home from him. Third, as befits a returning sinner. That settles it, you see. I've used his money, and I can never get away again. But what does it matter? I've had Oliver and happiness . . . and without Oliver it doesn't matter to me where or how I live. I shall think of the sunshine and the veldt and the long happy days and Oliver. I shall walk about and cook and wash and eat, but I shan't be living. My mind and my heart will be in Africa . . . and by and by I shall really die and find out whether the God of my husband is real . . . or not. I don't believe in Him

myself. It would have killed Oliver to think he had dragged me down to absolute pauperism . . . it would have killed his self-respect. . . . Beg him to do what I want him to do, go back to his family. Make him do it for my sake, so that I shall really have accomplished something. . . . Good-bye, my dear, I should have liked to tell you, to say good-bye, but you have talked reasonably to me and . . . but really I am being, for once, the epitome of reason! Good-bye . . . and good luck . . . Lydia."

Davida slowly folded up the letter, her face was blanched and her eyes dark.

"I am not at all sure," she said in a small, whispering voice, "that the people like Lydia's husband, who brandish their religion and call themselves Christians, are not in reality the followers of the Anti-Christ . . . always providing you admit the existence of a God and immortality . . . for they turn people away from the religion of Christ by their shameful adhesion to its name. Could anybody with any instincts of decency belong to a religion preached and practised by such people. . . ."

She sat still, thinking with a sick pity of Lydia among such maulers of Christianity; of Lydia, so gallant, being baited by their greasy virtue, their lip-service to goodness.

"How could she? How could she?" she said suddenly, "she was wrong . . . how could she?"

Oliver said slowly and with intolerable pain: "She had a passion for sacrifice."

He went over to the door and stood there, shielding his eyes against the glare, and staring hopelessly over the scarred *vlei*.

Davida sat still, thinking of a certain time in her childhood when she had rebelled passionately and wildly against the religion taught her by her governess. Her father, who belonged to no church, decided that whatever he thought or did, Davida must at least be given the opportunity of professing a religion. But at the age of fourteen, appalled and outraged by the idea of Heaven as presented by her governess, a glorified Sunday School, a perpetual morning service, with God like a super-vicar, patting the angels' heads and scowling righteously at the sinners who shrieked in hell; horrified by the pleased acquiescence of her governess in this conception, and by her equally pleased conviction that Heaven would be her portion and would consist of people like her, Davida had flung her Bible on the floor and rushed out of the room and to her father, saying: "I would rather be dead for ever, I believe I shall be dead for ever . . . I want to be dead, quite dead, when I am dead. I don't believe it . . . and if I did believe it I couldn't bear to go to Heaven." Not realizing in her anguished revolt that people must interpret religion according to their several natures, and that her governess merely pointed out the sort of Heaven that appeared to her as the height of bliss. From that time onward she never willingly met anyone who was avowedly religious, and clung to a shaky conviction that when the body died, everything died. And

though sometimes, against her will, she thought of the crystal beauty of Christ's life, she thought as little as possible and pushed away any disquieting doubts as to His inspiration. Christianity, she said, was invented by man for his comfort, and obviously man wanted something to comfort him for having to exist. . . . She did not carry her arguments very far, but she rebelled against Christianity because of the loud-voiced apostles of angry sects, much as she rebelled against communism because of the unpleasant-looking people who advocated it. Just as foul things were done in the name of Liberty, so, she said, were fouler things done in the name of God. She could not see Christianity for the drab little temples and chapels that obscured the vision.

Oliver broke into her thoughts: "She knew I could never pull out of this. She saw us going on and on. I'm all right when things are fairly easy, but I don't seem to know how to stop a rot. I spent most of my money. I couldn't even tell you how it went . . . not on purple and fine linen, anyway. We thought that out here we might do something with what I had left. It sounded easy enough from the booklets. But I'm no good. When I've sold this place I'll have about fifty quid. I could get home on that, and she knew it. . . . What should we have done? There are dozens of good men who have gone broke on their own farms, men who can farm, who are looking for jobs managing someone else's. We'd come to the end. . . ."

"Couldn't you have come to us?" asked Davida.



He continued to stare out of the door.

"I cannot dig . . . to beg I am ashamed," he quoted wearily. "What damned good am I? I take her away from a miserable life and all I do is to land her penniless in the end."

He turned round slowly.

"I didn't deserve her to stay with me . . . but that wasn't why she went. She went because she wanted to save me from the final failure . . . the worst humiliation: to save me from the state that lovers get to when they make suicide pacts. And to make it quite final, to make it impossible for her ever to return, as a barrier against her love, she went back to *him*. Oh, my God, Davida, you don't know what that means. . . ."

"But we must get her back," cried Davida a little wildly. "I can manage to lend you some money, or Charles will. We'll do something . . . cable the boat . . . tell her to come back . . . that everything's all right. And something can be fixed up."

"We can't do anything," said Oliver dully, "she wouldn't come now . . . she wouldn't come if I had all the money in the world. . . ."

"It's impossible . . . impossible," thought Davida fiercely. It was unbelievable . . . a dream. Lydia would come in a minute with her graceless smile and her dark hair wind-tossed . . . she would take a cigarette in her thin fingers and begin to laugh about Oliver's forgetfulness. She couldn't have vanished into a limbo that smelt of cooking and grease and oilcloth and gas-fires

. . . that damp, indefinite smell that lurks in the passages of lodging-houses. Not Lydia. . . .

"He was such a swine," said Oliver tonelessly, as if it relieved him to talk and talk, "fat, and successful in a small way. He belonged to some strange sect, and he clasped his hands across his stomach and looked holy. She married him when she was very young; her family pushed it on, they were hard up and there were her sisters coming along. . . . I tell you she had a passion for sacrifice. . . ." He made a hopeless movement with his hands. "She didn't even despise me for a helpless fool . . . she only loved me. . . ."

He sat down again in the rookie-chair, leaning forward, his hands clasped between his knees. "Oh, God," he muttered, "what a damn failure I am!"

Davida slid off the table and went over to him. She put one hand on his shoulder; in the fingers of her other hand the inevitable cigarette blew a thin banderole of blue smoke. Far away was the sound of a galloping horse, and she knew with a wry amusement that it was Charles. She was sure of it. When she had wanted him to come and see the Templemans, when she had felt that Lydia would have liked him to come, he had never been near the place. Now, at the wrong moment (she felt instinctively that Lydia's tale would receive no sympathy from him) he came.

"I'll sell everything," said Oliver. "I can't stay here without her. . . ."

The distant hoofbeats were coming nearer. She could

see Charles mentally, a little flushed, stony-eyed, angry because he had been seen at the Sylvesters'. There was something funny about Charles calling on the Sylvesters when he was supposed to be down with the tractor.

Thud! Thud! Thud! The horse was sweeping up to the hut and still Davida stood silent, her hand on Oliver's shoulder, and her cigarette melting away in the drifting burgee of smoke.

The horse stopped with a slither and clatter and the doorway was darkened by Charles, hand on hip, sjambok dangling from his wrist, smiling bleakly. Davida smiled back, a faint amusement lightening her eyes.

Oliver did not notice him. He was thinking of Lydia and the aching loneliness that encompassed him.

Davida signed to Charles to go out of the hut and followed him into the glaring sunshine.

"Lydia's gone home," she said abruptly.

"If it upsets him as much as all that," said Charles laconically, "why didn't he go with her?"

"You know they haven't a penny. . . ."

"How did Lydia get home, then?"

She hesitated: "It's a long story . . . I'll tell you some other time."

He flicked at a stone with his sjambok. "Well . . . are you going to stay here administering comfort indefinitely?"

But at that moment Oliver came out.

"Hullo, Bruce," he said.

"Hullo," said Charles briefly.

Oliver turned to Davida: "Will you tell Barneveldt something?" he asked, "anything . . . so long as the old man doesn't think I didn't appreciate his offer?"

"I will, of course," she said.

They all three stood irresolutely, with nothing to say. Charles turned to his horse and looked at Davida expectantly. Oliver leant against the hut and screwed up his eyes and stared out over the baking veldt. Davida turned to him. She was hot with a feeling of helplessness and anger . . . if only she had known sooner . . . perhaps she might have been able to help. . . .

"Oliver," she said urgently, "couldn't you do something when you get to England?"

"You don't imagine I'm going to England, do you?" he asked incredulously. "Do you think I'm as low as that? . . ."

"But Oliver . . ." she began in distress, when Charles came back with her horse. "Look here, Templeman," he said curtly, "if you want any money to get home, I could let you have it."

"No thanks," said Oliver abruptly.

Charles raised his eyebrows. "Come on, Davida, we ought to get back. Well, so long, Templeman . . . hope you fix everything up satisfactorily."

He felt raw and savage. He hated people with that easy knack of getting sympathy, people who found it easy to tell their inmost feelings; there was, to him, something almost indecent in baring one's sorrows to anyone, and he, far more than Davida, believed that one should

not attempt to influence other people by playing on their sympathies. He expected Davida always to understand that when he made unpleasant remarks it was because he was afraid of being fulsome. . . . And he was always afraid of appearing emotional. He felt that he had been perilously near effusiveness when he offered to lend Oliver his fare home.

"Oliver," said Davida, "I shall see you again. . . ."

He pressed her hand and let it drop and she turned reluctantly to her horse. That was the way in Rhodesia. Things were impermanent. People went broke and left . . . they just drifted away. Of course, there were a few successful men . . . and there were those who just squatted on their farms, never making any money, but managing to exist. And the Dutch . . . they stuck to the land and had large families. . . . Otherwise it seemed that people had always just arrived, full of enthusiasm, full of hope . . . or else they were just going broke, hanging on and on . . . until one day they just went! She felt lonely and beaten. The hot, indifferent land seemed to ripple in derisive laughter at these people who scratched its surface and thought they were making an effect on it. Native Commissioners went about looking after the natives. Policemen patrolled the districts. Government experts went about telling people the best way to farm. A few lucky people did what they said and had bumper crops and rejoiced and were made much of and pointed out to newcomers as examples of what the right man could do. It was very important and

fine! But . . . look at the farms that had changed hands, find out their histories.

"Well," said Charles, breaking in on her contemplation, "what's the matter with the Templemans?"

Wearily, for she did not much care at the moment whether he sympathized or not, she told him.

His face hardened and his eyes became a bright, chilly blue, and introspective, as if he looked down the lane of memory.

"I've no time for wife-stealers," he said.

"No?" said Davida in bored tones.

"No," said Charles violently, "nor for seducers nor the exponents of free-love, nor for any of the rest of the loose-thinking, slack-minded crew."

"Your theories were not so uncompromising in England," observed Davida.

"War has a curious effect on one's mentality," he rejoined grimly.

She had a fleeting thought of the Sylvesters and wondered whether he had fallen in love with herself merely as a result of the curious mental effect of war. Did he really find Eileen Sylvester more attractive . . . more "easy" to be with?

But Charles was still looking down the lane of memory, and thinking how when he was in England he forgot for a short time a story told him when he was fifteen years old.

"I think, after all, I will go home," said Davida thoughtfully.

"I'm damned if you will," said Charles. He drove his heels into his horse's side and as it bounded forward, used the curb mercilessly. He did not know how like his father he looked, and if he had known, he would have been surprised that anyone should think that a physical resemblance connoted a mental resemblance.

But Davida was seized with irrational panic. He was as odd, as unreasonable as the rest of his family. England and her father seemed as remote as Mars. It seemed at that moment impossible to get away if Charles did not want her to go. She would never get away. She would become like Alice, sullen, apathetic, relieving her feelings by futile whining.

She made an effort to shake the panic off. "Don't be absurd," she said coldly.

Charles did not answer, only glanced at her with eyes that were as blank as his father's.

They cantered in silence up the drive and when she dismounted, he took her horse silently and went off towards the stables.

Alice came out to meet her.

"Phew! . . . how hot it is," she sighed. "Aren't you boiled, Davida?"

"No," said Davida bitterly, "I'm frozen!"

And she walked past the astounded Alice and into her bedroom.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

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### I

OLIVER TEMPLEMAN went away without again seeing Davida. She rode over the following morning, but he had already gone, and the huts, which had, under Lydia's influence, been dwelling-places, were tumble-down, poverty-stricken Kaffir huts. There was nothing to show that they had ever been the habitation of white people. Oliver had taken his few sticks of furniture, his ox-wagon and departed utterly. The huts were desolate in the heartless sunshine, marooned like an old ship rotting in a hot lagoon.

Davida hobbled her horse and sat down on the ground in the shade of a hut. She tried to conjure up that atmosphere of the place when Lydia had been there, but already Lydia was rather vague, like a waking dream, which one tries vainly to recall as the grey dawn filters through the blinds. Her home was nothing but a few mud huts with straw blowing around them; and the sordidness that had never been noticed when she was there, was now all that could be noticed. A circle of charred ground proclaimed that a bonfire had been burning, and Davida supposed that Oliver had been burning odds and ends . . . the odds and ends that are only burned when one stolidly

sets out to obliterate the past . . . snapshots taken when they had first come out. "Lydia, Lydia feeding the chickens, Oliver ploughing, Oliver with a baboon he had shot, Lydia and Oliver, Lydia and Oliver, Lydia and Oliver with Davida." Old letters, old English periodicals, old clothes, old hopes . . . all now black ashes. There was nothing but sadness. The Templemans were gone. There was a fearful finality about it. Yesterday it had not seemed possible. To-day it seemed as if they had been gone for years.

She thought, drawing diagrams in the red dust with her riding-whip, of Charles. Of course, she could go home if she wanted to. She had only to write to her father and he would send her the passage money, or, for that matter, come and fetch her. But did she really want to go? Not really. Not yet. There was something about marriage, even in these emancipated days. It was a coil not so lightly to be shuffled off.

She looked very young, her eyes serious and a little sad, her mouth a coral line, set into resolution. She sat hugging her knees, eyes dreaming.

Near by her horse cropped the coarse grass and shuffled and stamped.

The Templemans were gone! Not only gone, but gone beyond recall—dead. Their nostrils filled with dust. And over their white bones rustles the sands of eternal Africa.

## II

Somebody was riding towards the huts. She shaded her eyes against the glare. It was Douglas Pelham and another man. Douglas had been rather a friend of the Templemans. A gay young man, more often in Salisbury than on his farm. She sat on, waiting for him to arrive. He might have news of Oliver.

Pelham arrived first, his companion trotting some distance behind.

"Hullo, hullo, hullo!"

"Hullo," said Davida.

Long ago, it seemed to her, she had talked to people like Pelham easily, had hullo'd equally redundantly. Now she felt rusticated, awkward.

"Old Oliver was off in an awful hurry," said Pelham as he dismounted. "I met him in Salisbury last night, and just as luck would have it, he wanted to sell his farm, and this fellow coming along behind me wants a farm . . . so what's easier? I brought him out early this morning."

It was to Davida a constant source of wonder the way most Rhodesians, from a perverted idea of loyalty, would allow new-comers to buy rotten farms if the owners of such farms were acquaintances, when they would loudly warn new-comers against buying bad company's land. After the unfortunate buyer had bought the farm and become a farmer, he was invariably told that he ought never to have bought it, and was told with genuine sym-

pathy. But before he bought, no voice was raised in warning. However, when he wanted to sell it, he benefited by it, she supposed.

"What's Oliver doing?" she asked absently.

"Oh, he bunked off on the mail to-day for England, home and beauty."

He looked at her with merry, slightly impertinent, dark eyes.

"You're looking rather crooked . . . you ought to come up for Show Week."

"I might bring Alice up," she said thoughtfully.

He made an impertinent face.

"Why burden yourself?"

The other man rode up, took off his hat and dismounted neatly.

"This is Mark Lill," said Pelham, "he's trying to get out of paying super-tax in England!"

Lill was a small, dark man with a long nose, very immaculate. He had a shy smile, his eyes were grey-blue, set wide apart, and they twinkled, his mouth wide with thin lips that could close hardly and cruelly. He looked at Oliver's huts with some distaste.

"Is this where he lived?" he asked politely.

His voice was soft and precise.

"It didn't look quite like this when he lived here," said Davida.

He put on his wide-brimmed hat carefully, pulling it on as a woman does, from the back.

Pelham said: "You're not out here to make money

. . . you're within reasonable motoring distance of Salisbury, and you've got a good view and a good site for a house. . . ."

"Yes," objected Lill, "but could I get a house built before the rains start?"

"If it's not a mansion and you're prepared to pay Deem to get a move on!" said Pelham confidently.

Lill's long, grey-blue eyes rested on Davida and then on the dilapidated circle of huts. The hazy heat seemed to shimmer and dance round her. She looked tired, her eyes shone out of her small face and he liked the humour that lurked round her lips. He had heard a lot about these Bruces. . . . Salisbury speculated on how long Davida would stand it . . . and he was invariably interested in unusual people. He looked round the veldt again. Oliver's mealie "lands," hot red gashes in the waving grass . . . the distant small kopje, grey and shimmering, the mimosa trees . . . the distant line of twisted bush. He had seen better places, among cheerful, tennis-playing farmers . . . but . . . he glanced at Davida again and screwed up his candid eyes.

"I suppose I could get some sort of a house up," he said.

Davida was wondering whether Douglas Pelham had lent Oliver money with which to go home, and if that was the reason of his anxiety to persuade Lill to buy the farm. While she thought about it, her eyes became dreamy and her lips parted slightly; she looked as if she were dreaming of far, far lands and lovely things that

existed in fairy books for children and in poetry for grown-ups.

"All right," said Lill abruptly, "I'll buy it."

"Good man," said Pelham, "you'd better get a car if you're going backwards and forwards much."

David's eyes became still more wistful. She was wondering whether Pelham got a commission on cars sold from any dealer in Salisbury.

Pelham glanced at her.

"Will you come in sometimes and dance if Lill and I bring a car out to fetch you?" he asked.

She laughed, knowing Pelham's invitations to be dependent on the mood of the moment and easily forgotten by him.

"If you bring a car out," she said.

And then, on a sudden impulse, she plunged . . . "Come and lunch with us," she said, "or have you lunch concealed about your persons?"

"Love to," said Pelham promptly.

Lill looked troubled.

"I should like it immensely," he began, "but I thought that we were . . ."

"Oh, the Maynes won't wait," said Pelham, "nobody expects anybody definitely on the veldt."

David made no protest; she felt no need to worry about the Maynes.

"In that case," said Lill, "I should love to."

She noticed his extreme neatness, both of person and manner. An odd little man, she thought. And yet some-

thing about him disturbed her, made her conscious of herself, anxious about her appearance.

They cantered slowly away towards the bush. Pelham babbled cheerfully; he had, he said, the latest records out from home, the Salisbury band was appallingly out of date . . . and the people behind the times with their dance steps.

"I thought," murmured Davida, "that nowadays people didn't do steps . . . they just went their own sweet rhythmic way. Owing to the dancing-partner habit, which meant that you could only make up your steps with one person."

"Oh, no!" said Pelham. "Obviously you have steps—what would dancing masters and mistresses do if there were no steps?"

"Go out of business, I trust," said Lill.

"Oh, live and let live . . . live and let live," said Pelham reproachfully.

As they passed the Sylvesters' house, Mrs. Sylvester waved to them from the stoep, and also shouted something, an invitation, Davida thought to come and have some refreshment, but she chose to ignore it. Mrs. Sylvester did not offer her refreshment when she passed alone. The Sylvester girl was mooning about, apparently feeding chickens.

"Tiresome people," said Pelham, "you'll have to be firm with them, Lill, or the old lady will roost on your doorstep."



As they came near the homestead, Davida became the victim of a faint apprehension. Supposing the Old Man was drunk again . . . or Charles still sullen? And how would Alice behave? Alice was always either sulky or fulsome. Little pricking stabs of nervousness made her hands unsteady. She was, she thought angrily, as stupid as Alice . . . and why? Not surely because of this small, neat man who rode by her side . . . what did it matter what he thought? But she knew it was because of him! She was aware of a critical faculty about him . . . he was fastidious, he would be more disgusted than shocked. She did not mind people being shocked . . . she hated them to be disgusted. Were her own perceptions getting blunted. . . ?

But when they arrived the Old Man came to meet them, bland and immaculate as Lill himself.

"Glad to see you, Pelham . . . it's a long time since you've been our way."

There was a real geniality in his voice. He liked Pelham. Pelham possessed none of Archie's commendable little virtues. He, it was obvious, would not attempt to justify every small flirtation by talking about marriage.

But the Old Man contrived to make his daughter-in-law feel, against her experience, her bitter knowledge, that it was her own fault that people were so seldom entertained at the Bruce farm, so bland was he, so mellow, so courteous.

## III

The Old Man appeared to find in Lill a man after his own heart. They talked to one another to the exclusion of Davida and Pelham.

Davida wondered where Alice and Charles were, while Pelham looked round the place with his slightly impertinent, appraising glance. There was nothing, however, to criticize. In the cool veranda, with its green reed blinds, its Indian matting, its chair with green and white cushions, there was nothing but comfort and a pleasant ease.

Alice appeared. She strolled round the end of the veranda with an air of indifference that betrayed to Davida the fact that she had seen them coming, and had staged this apparently unconscious entrance, especially as she had changed into a white linen frock.

She looked pretty . . . cheeks flushed and eyes bright. Her father looked at her with interest.

"Alice," he observed, "ran to change her frock when she saw you all coming!"

The flush in Alice's cheeks deepened, but the brightness went out of her eyes, she moved her shoulders sulkily and sat down with an ungraceful flop. She began to talk rather loudly about Salisbury and dancing to Pelham. She languished at him. She wanted so desperately to make an impression, any sort of impression. Although she continually reviled Pelham, she would rather have made an impression on him than anybody else, because

he was so entirely indifferent to her. She said bitterly, at times, to Davida that she expected Pelham would soon go broke if he didn't pay more attention to his farm. It was a continual gnawing hurt to her pride that Pelham should go to Salisbury to find amusement, ignoring completely the fact that there were *girls* (the plural being a concession to Eileen Sylvester, whom she really despised) in the district. She thought about him more than she cared to admit, even to herself, and sometimes lay awake at night imagining situations in which he was completely subjugated and humbled. Now she talked too much, claiming his unwilling attention, while his eyes strayed to Davida.

But Davida sat back in her chair and smoked in silence. She was feeling exhausted, drained of all intelligence, and the effort of making conversation seemed to her frightful. The sudden vanishing of the Templemans had removed an integral part of her life, had cut away her background. Subconsciously, when they were there, they had reassured her, given her security. They had been a refuge. And now she must ride over to the Barneveltdts and explain why Oliver would not accept their help. She could hardly tell them about Lydia . . . she'd have to make up a convincing story.

"Don't you ever come to Salisbury?"

Pelham deliberately dragged her into the conversation. How irritatingly persistent he was! "No," she said briefly.

He was undeterred.

"Lill! Help me to persuade Mrs. Bruce that Salisbury is still on the map."

Lill hesitated, interrupted in his talk with the Old Man. But the Old Man himself answered: "She is so occupied in farming . . . wheat." He smiled at her placidly and kindly.

"Alack!" said Davida, equally placidly, "I have had to let the wheat give way to the garden, beauty before utility."

"Then you've no excuse," said Pelham; "come up to the dinner-dance at Meikle's. Lill and I will fetch you by car."

Did the idiot imagine that Charles did not exist? And his rudeness to Alice intentional . . . or merely the casual rudeness of the modern young man?

The Old Man stroked his beard and gazed upon them benevolently.

Lill, rather uncomfortable, susceptible to the darting undercurrents of meaning, to Pelham's impertinent ignoring of Alice, to Alice's quivering resentment, Davida's discomfort and the Old Man's enjoyment of the discomfort, intervened.

"Why not make up a party?" he said shyly. "Miss Bruce and Mrs. Bruce . . . and you, sir . . . and your son?"

"Oh no . . . no. But Davida and Alice must decide for themselves," said the Old Man. Davida saw Alice clench her hands, while a wave of crimson flowed into her cheeks. Her eyes were too anxious. . . .

"I think it would be rather fun," said Davida.

She suddenly saw Charles coming up from the mealies, walking through the hot sunshine with his hat off. A wave of the old tenderness flowed over her. She wished he would come and dance with them. But when he came in and sank into a chair, his long legs stretched out in front of him, he laughed and disclaimed any idea of so doing.

"Can Alice dance?" inquired the Old Man.

"Of course she can," said Davida.

"Can you, Alice?" said Charles.

"I'm a little out of practice . . ." said Alice.

Mac appeared at the door of the room to say that lunch was ready. Davida glanced at the *vlei* as she went in. It was bathed in translucent light, waves of yellow grass undulating towards the skyline, merging into the wavering line of bush, broken like the sea by tumbled rocks. It gave an intense feeling of solitude, of warm, lazy indifference. It was singularly untouched by the people who rode across it, called it theirs and boasted it tamed. "My farm. My land!" It was still Africa's, that inscrutable goddess's. It belonged, if to anything, to the big baboon who led the herd that raided man's mealie crops: or to the leopard who shouted far away in the night: to the lion in the dark shadows: even to the scavenging jackal, which yapped and then scurried silently away under the white moon as the pale-skinned usurper approached. She was beginning to get obsessed by the basking veldt. It was almost as if it lay waiting for something cataclysmic

to happen, as if it might suddenly wake from its lazy sleep and rend them.

In the cool dim dining-room, the Old Man expatiated on the excellence of guinea-fowl, blandly oblivious of such vain imaginings.

## I V

That evening Davida walked under the gum trees with Charles. The short incursion of strangers had restored normality to the atmosphere. They talked about the Templemans and Barry, about the necessity for riding over to the Barnevelts'. And once again Davida loved the quietness and coolness . . . the whisper of the grass under the night-wind that sighed its way across Africa. Night had laid a cool hand across the hot brow of day and drawn curtains of blue gauze across the intense eyes of the sun. There was an atmosphere of rest and peace and leisure.

"Seriously thinking of going home?" asked Charles.

"Don't think so. . . ."

He did not answer and she could not see his face.

"If the place were mine," he said after a minute, "I'd put it all in grazing . . . horses and cattle."

She considered it for a moment. "You'd want an income," she said.

"Oh, we'll have an income. Cattle and horses," he went on thoughtfully. "I should like that . . . herds

moving slowly . . . none of this grubbing in the earth, scratching Mother Africa's breast."

Herds moving slowly over the veldt, cropping the wiry grass into sweetness. Plodding, sweet-breathed beasts . . . and swift, clean-limbed horses. The long-legged calves and gawky foals, and dogs about the homestead. Dogs, muzzles between their paws, asleep on the stoep. It was how she felt . . . she had not known, so long was it since they had talked to each other, that Charles also felt it.

"Why don't we have dogs?" she asked.

"The Old Man doesn't like 'em."

"Oh. . . ."

It was as if everything waited for the Old Man to die. All their plans, their wishes . . . their life. Uncanny . . . their queer isolated existence sheltered by the long, low house, everything going on in their own patch of Africa, oblivious of other things, other people. They sent mealies to market, and they were sold and cheques came, they ordered things from the stores in Salisbury and they came . . . and life drowsed along. But within the house was friction, irritation, ambitions, rules, rebellions (smouldering), and above all the Old Man . . . patriarchal, enduring.

Before her she saw life stretching out. Charles, at last in possession of his inheritance, becoming patriarchal like his father, with his herds, his ox and his ass, his man-servant and his maid-servant, his wife and everything



that was his. And where would Alice be? If she didn't marry?

But Charles was unaware of anything patriarchal in his outlook. He had no particular desire to own anything . . . certainly he had no desire to own Davida. He supposed that she got bored at times, and nervy at times (and he knew that the Old Man was not easy to live with, but he thought that Davida understood that it was understandable in many ways) but if she really hated it, she would go away. If she loved him she would stay. She knew he hated to talk about the Old Man. He couldn't be discussed without disloyalty. The only complicated thing in his life was his affection for his father, but he did not see that it need complicate things for Davida. He saw life as a fairly simple matter: there were generally two courses open to you, and you chose the one that seemed best. If Davida hated living with his father more than she liked living with him, he supposed that she would not hesitate, and she was a free agent. He carefully refrained from trying to play on her sympathies.

"What did you think of that fellow Lill?" he asked.

"Funny little man," said Davida.

"Something to him all the same," said Charles. "But I'm not sure that I liked the something."

"Your father liked him!"

"Yes. . . ."

"Well," she said, "I suppose we go dancing a fortnight on Saturday . . . Heigh-ho, I haven't danced for ages!"

"Pelham's quite safe," said Charles thoughtfully. "But I'm not at all sure about that little man, Lill . . . you'd better keep an eye on Alice."

Davida was suddenly prickly with annoyance. Why Alice? Didn't he realize that it was not Alice that Lill liked? She caught the thought neatly in mid-air and stifled it. Its implications alarmed her. She was behaving like a schoolgirl . . . what did it matter who Lill did or did not like?

"I'll chaperon her sternly," she rejoined.

"You'd better chaperon yourself, too," he murmured. "Salisbury is full of ravening young men."

"You'd better come and look after me."

"If I had to do that, you wouldn't be worth the trouble," he said sombrely.

Alice, with her genius for appearing at the wrong moment, came out from the veranda and fluttered towards them. She had on a white frock that billowed.

"What a gorgeous night!" she said. "I simply had to come out."

They did not respond.

"How dull you are," she said brightly, "as dull as father is in there."

Charles gave a short laugh. He saw vividly the Old Man's boredom left with Alice.

He glanced at Davida, but she was staring out over the dark *vlei*. With a faint resentment, he went in to talk to the Old Man. He did so dislike Alice. . . .

## CHAPTER NINE

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THE Barneveldts lived in an old, solid, mud-walled house, a low, squat building surrounded by unrelieved bareness. Its thick walls were destitute of whitewash, its roof thickly and untidily thatched. Around the trodden earth lay hot and red; a few nondescript chickens scratched wearily in the hard ground. Behind it ploughed "lands," utilitarian and bare, stretched beneath the unwinking blue sky. A dirty native, ragged, but proudly attired in trousers, squatted by a kitchen hut. He did not move when Davida rode up, only looked at her with lack-lustre eyes. There was no one else about.

"*Upi lo Baas?*" said Davida.

He stood up slowly and jerked his thumb over his shoulder. *He* did not know where the Baas was. . . .

"Far away," he volunteered.

She looked over the hot landscape. There was no plough to be seen, no oxen. It was utterly deserted.

"How far?" she said patiently.

The cookboy (she guessed it was the cookboy) waved his arm vaguely.

"Far away up . . ." he said.

There was no woman in the Barneveldt household.

Mrs. Barneveldt had been dead for some years . . . and Piet was not married. There were no trees near the homestead . . . not even the usual pathetic attempt at a garden. An oleander bush bloomed incongruously in the midst of the trodden ground near the house. From the bush nearby came the perpetual kloo-klooming of a colony of doves. The kloo-klooming merged into the silence and became part of it.

The cookboy watched Davida with dull eyes. He hoped she would soon go away. But she sat on irresolutely. Tiresome to come for nothing: it meant she would have to come over again.

"When will the Baas be back?" she asked.

Now how could the cookboy know that? He shrugged his shoulders. When the Baas returned there would be "scoff" to get. Mealie-meal porridge and potatoes and buck. But how could he know when the Baas would come?

Her horse fidgeted and trampled about the place. She wanted to get her message told and go back, and her impatience and nerviness communicated themselves to the horse. He shuffled and snorted and sidled. Was there nobody else in this oven of a world except herself and the cookboy?

"Oh, damn!" she said aloud.

The cookboy grinned. That was a word familiar to him.

But fortunately at the end of the track appeared a man on horseback, a tall figure in a blue shirt, an old khaki *terai* pulled down over his eyes. Undoubtedly the

young Barneveldt. And as he came nearer on a small, skinny, Basuto pony, that seemed much too small to carry him, so that his legs almost reached the ground, against her will Davida thought of Alice. After all, this young man was not so bad-looking. Tall and limber on that absurd pony. . . .

He took off his hat and his hair shone darkly in the bright sunlight.

"I wanted to see your father," said Davida.

"I'm sorry. He has gone over to the store."

"Oh. . . ."

She considered with a slight frown.

"Perhaps he might be back soon," said Piet hopefully.

"It doesn't matter."

She smiled at him suddenly, sorry for his shyness, his clumsiness.

"Will you give him a message for me?"

"Sure," he said.

Then he flushed surprisingly.

"Won't you come on to the stoep and have some coffee?" he added.

She looked round, amazed at the mention of a stoep, and saw that round the low, solid house was a four-foot veranda, supported by twisted *mopani* poles, and roofed with a low, dilapidated thatch. "I'm afraid I haven't time . . ." she began.

He interrupted her with an unexpected smile which showed his white teeth.

"Will you come again, then?"

"If I am invited," she answered.

"My father would be glad," he said simply.

"I will come," she promised. "But, listen, will you tell your father this from me? Oliver Templeman wanted to tell him that he thanked him very much . . . that at any other time he would have accepted his offer with gladness . . . but that he is going home, has gone in fact. When your father saw him he was in great trouble. He had received news that upset him very much, and made it absolutely imperative for him to go home . . . so as he was selling up in any case, it wasn't necessary for him to accept your father's offer . . . but he was very grateful, indeed . . ." She hesitated. "Do you understand?" she went on. "I'm afraid I haven't been very clear . . . it's difficult to explain. But I do want your father to know how awfully grateful Oliver . . . Mr. Templeman . . . really was."

"It's all right, Mrs. Bruce, my father will understand."

"Well," she glanced at the sun, "I must get on."

He asked suddenly: "How is Miss Bruce?"

"Who? Oh, Alice . . . she's quite well. . . ."

She spoke stiffly through shyness. He looked so earnest and uncomfortable.

"Will you give her my—my regards?"

"I certainly will," said Davida.

"And you will . . . perhaps one day you and Miss Bruce will come over and have coffee?"

"We'd love to . . . thanks very much."

She wondered where he had learnt his English, it was very good. But as she rode homewards she thought uncomfortably that there was no hope of fulfilling her acceptance. Charles would never go . . . and Alice would never admit to sufficient friendliness with Piet Barneveldt to agree to go openly to tea with him. Davida wondered grimly how often Alice had met the young man, and how she justified such very clandestine meetings to him . . . or whether she pretended even to herself that she just met him by chance. "Little beast!" thought Davida.

Her wheat "lands" lay dreaming under the kopje. M'Shebi was there with the cultivator and oxen . . . Davida sighed. She was losing interest . . . what interest could she have in a thing that was not really her own? She had dreamt of making a home . . . and the dream had receded into the dusty limbo of hopeless things. What home could she make in a house that was not hers . . . or with Alice there? And even when the place did belong to Charles, there would always be the shadow of the Old Man.

She spurred her horse and galloped towards the homestead.



## CHAPTER TEN

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### I

ALICE was in great distress about her frock for the dance. She had, she said, absolutely nothing, and her hair looked awful. She must have it done. Couldn't they go up earlier so that she could have it done? She wanted to have it shingled. She became suddenly convinced that, with her hair shingled, the world lay at her feet. But she had no really smart frock, and her hair was not shingled, and she was in an agony of apprehension. She kept up a stream of petulant complaints, and Davida, who thought she ought to be pleased and excited at the idea of the dance, became irritated and unsympathetic. She offered to lend her a frock, but Alice flounced and said she knew quite well it would be too small.

"Try banting, then," suggested Davida.

The Old Man had spent the day in an easy chair on the veranda, watching Alice's preparations with ironic interest. He stroked his beard and stared out at his garden with mild blue eyes. Anyone seeing him would have thought, how charming an old man. . . . how charming a setting, for the wide veranda was barred with sunlight, but in the shadow the whitewashed walls and tubs of flowers looked cool and restful; and the Old Man, with

his white hair and white drill suit, his cigar, his thin, blue-veined hand resting on his open book gave an impression of security and pleasant peace. Davida lay in a long chair at the other end, immersed in the English papers, a glint of sunlight from a chink in the reed blinds on her hair. For all her absorbed look, she too was excited. It seemed to her that for months she had not talked to anyone, certainly not to Charles. For months she had *said* things to people and there had been no reciprocity. She missed talk . . . missed the interminable arguments that had taken place among her friends in England, and between herself and Charles before they really settled down on the farm—long, exciting discussions about God and politics and morals and the future life, and Spiritualism and Theosophy, talks that had no conclusion, in which no one ever reached a conclusion, in which there never was any conclusion to be reached, but which left one stimulated and happy. But it appeared that when one came to Rhodesia, one gave up talking! Nothing happened to stimulate any subject into a matter for discussion. Charles didn't care two hoots what the government did; he no longer appeared to take any interest in abstract subjects, and they were come to a dead end. Alice was interested in nothing except herself and her hard lot (she would talk about that for hours on end, but as a subject for discussion it palled) and had the maddening trick of the uninformed and half-educated of laughing heartily at anything she could not understand, and like them she thought that flat contradiction proved her right.

The Old Man did not. He made remarks and observations of a conclusive nature. He smiled and stroked his beard and looked superior. The Templemans had talked. It was since they had gone that she felt that rot of ideas. She tried to think who else talked, who could take their place: Douglas Pelham indulged in conversational flirtation . . . presumably the Barneveldts did not talk. The Maynes had a fund of small talk, they could keep up an unflagging interchange of words, polite laughter, and when they found the small coin of social chatter running short, would relapse into playing bridge. There was no one else . . . the other farmers of the district she hardly knew, but they did not look as if they talked. Perhaps among themselves they became quite animated about weevils and insect pests . . . which was more than Charles and his father did. With the usual rapidity it had got about that the Templemans had not been married. Davida had ridden over to the last farmers' meeting, and for quite half an hour after the meeting itself was over the people lingered on discussing the Templemans. People who never attended a meeting from one year's end to another were there, lured by the spicy rumours that had reached them on their outlying farms, probably through the kind offices of Barry. Facts of that kind seemed to leak out always, as if the very air would exude them. Davida heard the Maynes discussing it with the Sylvesters of all people, and reflected wearily that one thing most people had in common was a joyful and virtuous faculty for discussing moral lapses. Mr. Mayne

snorted indignantly, horrified that he had harboured Lydia for a few hours in his house. Davida felt too weary, too conscious of the dreamlike quality of their sojourn, to protest. What did Lydia care, anyway, what construction was put upon her action. . . . What foul tongues people had! But now that the Templemans had gone, she had been increasingly aware of an isolation. . . . One lost count of the hot, empty days. She felt like a lizard basking in the sun, lying there motionless on a grey rock in the blistering heat . . . time stretched away behind her and in front of her. . . . There were only two things to do in Rhodesia, work like the devil, or flirt like the devil . . . otherwise one became a vegetable slowly withering in the sun.

But Lill would talk. She was sure of that and she was aching to talk.

The Old Man stood up and walked slowly across the veranda. He stood still at the door, stroking his beard and looking at the garden, then he went out and she saw him walk ponderously towards the orchard, occasionally picking off a faded rose, or bending over one that he thought particularly fine. He picked two and went towards his own quarters.

Alice appeared as if by magic. She had been washing her hair.

"Does it look too awful?" she asked anxiously.

"No, it looks quite all right," said Davida.

"Do you think Mr. Lill's married?"

"Heaven only knows . . . why?"

"Oh, I don't know," she looked smug and pleased, "only I thought he looked rather interesting . . . he doesn't look married."

"You'd better ask him," said Davida and yawned.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," giggled Alice.

"Why not . . . if you're interested?"

"I'm not at all interested," said Alice sulkily.

## II

Charles strolled in just as Davida had finished dressing, threw his coat on the bed and stretched mightily.

"Lord, I'm tired," he said.

"What have you been doing all day?" she asked absently.

"Dipping, sweet one; a fragrant job."

She remembered, with a slight feeling of guilt, that until a few months ago she had always been down to the dip with him, and had found a sense of excited interest in the herds as they were driven up, bawling and jostling, in clouds of golden dust; and that she had felt distinctly proud of Charles, as he stood tall and strong by the dip, and dealt expertly and firmly with obstreperous oxen and the massive, bellowing bulls. Somehow she had stopped going . . . had stopped enjoying meals eaten picnic-fashion with him; somehow there had been nothing to say . . . no point in going.

She got out her scent and sprayed her hair.

Rather aggressively Charles went over to the wash-stand. "I'm filthy," he said, as if he wanted to emphasize the difference between her scented hair and himself sprayed with cattle dip.

"Oh, damn," he said, seeing that she had used the wash-hand basin. "I'll wait for a bath."

"Mac's got it ready in the bath-house," she said.

"By the way," his tone was, she thought, a shade too casual, "the Sylvester girl blew up when I was dipping and shared my lunch."

"That was nice," said Davida.

"Oh, she's not a bad child . . . she doesn't have much of a time out here . . . never sees anybody."

"Nor does Alice," observed Davida amiably.

"Oh, damn Alice!"

"Damn her by all means," said Davida, "but don't expect me to waste sympathy on the Sylvester girl, who isn't any worse off . . . probably better. No doubt she'll marry Piet Barneveldt in the fullness of time, and most suitably . . . but what on earth do you think is going to happen to Alice?"

"In the fullness of time she'll either marry, or go off and find her feet somewhere else. . . ."

From across the *vlei* came the long-drawn wail of a motor horn.

"There they are," said Davida.

Alice, who had been hectically dressing for the past two hours, and who had spent the last half-hour fiddling with her hair, and alternately powdering her face and



rubbing the powder off for fear of overdoing it, appeared at the door.

Charles regarded her with aversion.

"There they are," said Alice, breathlessly.

Davida picked up a cloak and fan and turned to the door.

"Cheerio, Charles!" she said. "Or are you coming to see us off?"

He shook his head. "Too filthy to face two immaculate tails and white waistcoats . . . cheerio, and have a good time!"

There was no one on the veranda, not even the Old Man. There was something rather rude in this ignoring of the two arrivals, but as Davida detested apologetic explanations, she said nothing. Lill handed Alice in to the front seat next to Pelham, who was driving, and Davida into the seat next himself. She heard a muffled exclamation from Pelham that sounded rude, but Alice giggled excitedly, apparently unaware of it.

### III

Pelham drove silently, having reduced Alice by the brevity of his replies to an uncomfortable sensation of non-success. And Lill was also silent, though his silence was of a different quality, serene and friendly. Nor did it in any way alter Davida's conviction that he could talk. Alice had scorned a scarf to tie round her head,



preferring to appear with her hair windblown, having in her mind's eye a picture of a young woman with curly, becomingly dishevelled hair, such as are portrayed on magazine covers; but Pelham drove fast and the car was open, so that her hair was blown into snaky strands and whipped across her eyes. She sat silent and on the verge of tears.

The evening was clear and warm, the sandy road wound like a pale ribbon in front of them under the dark blue tapestry of sky embroidered with pale wind-flowers. Soon they were far past the Sylvesters', whose lamplit homestead lay lost and alone in the vast night; and as they passed the end of the Maynes' home track, they saw the lights of Archie's car, which was waiting to take him in to the dance. Davida's eyes were on the pale track ahead, but she was conscious of Lill's curious, long-lashed eyes turning for ever towards her. Far away to the left as they skirted the native reserve, a cluster of Kaffir huts perched on a rise against the sky like a clump of toadstools. As the car rushed past their fires looked like so many sparks rushing into the black mouth of a chimney. A yelping chorus of Kaffir dogs died away behind them. A native youth and girl stood motionless by the track and stared at them with expressionless eyes as they flashed past, and then they left the side track and came into the broad wagon track that led to Enkel-doorn. It was wide and rutted, sprawling across the open veldt; growing every year a little wider as the wagons encroached on to the grass in the wet season to avoid the

red, streaming morasses that were like gaping wounds. Davida became full of a mounting excitement. Here was new ground . . . she had come down this road . . . how many months ago and had never seen it since? Salisbury became invested with the glamour and movement of a great metropolis. She sat bolt upright, her eyes shining.

They came to the fenced farms, to gates which had to be opened and shut. "Damn them," said Pelham. Alice sat huddled in her seat, trying to hold her hair in place with her hands. And then at last, just beyond the outskirts of Salisbury, where the law demanded that all natives should be in the town compound by dark, were the wagons outspanned, their drivers and leaders squatting round fires, smoking and gossiping. Ahead the lights of Salisbury gleamed against the sky, urbane, thrilling. Past the cemetery, the cattle market, and into Manica road, its red ground still uneven between its pavements, its plate-glass windows crying defiance to the enclosing veldt, its brave high buildings of brick and stone . . . and the hotel, big and solid, brightly lit. Beyond, the club lay white and punctuated with lights, and the wide, well-planned streets lay quiet under the glamorous night, with their houses and gardens and young trees that would one day become tall and stately avenues . . . and yet, with it all, there was something pathetic . . . there was the crudeness and bumptiousness of youth . . . the pathetic bravado, the hasty putting away of its old wood and tin shanties . . . the look what I've done . . . what

I am . . . air. It had a railway and a club and a big hotel or two and stores and a Government house and cars and dances and Society . . . and yet it seemed only playing at these things, a little outpost town pretending to be London or New York. Over it loomed the kopje, that had forgotten so many things that happened before Rhodes saw it . . . and that might even yet forget that once a creeping town had spread its frail tentacles about its feet. For, thought Davida, suddenly quelled, we die; and nations die and towns crumble into ruins, tumble back into the wrinkled dust and are finished. And little towns. A God coughs and they are not. Sand rustles over the crumbling thresholds, the "lone and level sands." Bones lie under and hopes, and—then some day there comes an Authority with a spade. He digs and digs, and finds the little town and tells the world of his discovery. But he cannot tell the world of its hopes and dreams. The sand holds those for ever. For a moment she had a horrible feeling that she herself and Lill and Pelham and Alice might without warning, and in the passing of a second, become grinning skeletons and whisper into dust; so long was eternity and so short life.

But Alice was out of the car and standing rather forlornly by its side. Pelham still sat sulkily in the driver's seat.

"Come on," said Lill cheerfully, "there's time for a cocktail before dinner."

"Oh, go on, then," said Pelham. "I'll put your bus away for you."

Davida caught Lill's eyes and smiled. Alice walked wretchedly up the steps, trying as she went to push away the loose strands of hair, and painfully conscious of her dishevelled appearance.

The hotel entrance was full of chattering people. The unaccustomed babble confused Davida. It made her feel that her voice could not be heard unless she shouted; she could hardly understand what Lill was saying. . . .

"We'd better go and powder our noses," she said slowly and distinctly.

He nodded.

"See you in the lounge!"

In the ladies' cloakroom, Alice looked at herself in the big mirror. Everything was wrong: her hair, her frock, her face, everything. The overpowering conviction of failure made her adopt a bouncing, aggressive air. She re-did her hair and re-powdered her nose.

She adopted a confidential attitude towards Davida. "I don't think much of the people," she murmured.

Davida took no notice. She wished fervently that she could have come without her.

Alice looked with conscious scorn at a girl with a Spanish shawl, who was using a lipstick and gave an audible giggle.

Then she followed Davida, who had walked away towards the lounge.

Lill and Pelham were sitting at a table near the entrance to the dining-room, with four cocktails in front of them. Pelham, thought Davida, must have already

had one, or even two, he was so much more cheerful than he had been in the car.

"Hullo, hullo, hullo," he said, "there's a good crowd here to-night . . . absolutely everybody."

Davida with her cool air and slender figure, her golden frock and small dark head, pleased him. He felt that she did him credit, but Alice! Alice, smiling and nodding, being vivacious about nothing, rolling her eyes at him, and looking round the room to see who was noticing her, infuriated him. It spoilt the party. And moreover Lill, with his infernal quiet cleverness, monopolized Davida, leaving him with no alternative but to regard Alice as his partner, making it quite plain to all with eyes to see, that he, Pelham, was saddled with Old Bruce's daughter.

Alice drank her cocktail with an air.

"Heavens, I haven't been up to town for ages," she said.

Davida was filled with a desire to shake her. Silly little donkey! Everybody knew that she never did come to Salisbury: why put on these airs?

But Lill, who possessed the gift of pouring balm on sore places, began to talk and spun a silky web of pleasant nothings over the other three, until after one more cocktail they went in to dinner.

#### I V

While Davida was dancing with Mark Lill, he said: "What's the trouble with your sister-in-law? She's a

pretty girl . . . but somehow she seems to get disliked?"

He asked in the interested voice of a scientist discussing some strange phenomena, quite impersonally.

"I don't know," said Davida in the same impersonal tone, as if Alice were a microbe, whose strange antics she was observing through a microscope. "Sort of inferiority complex, I imagine."

"Still," said Lill, "it's too bad of Pelham. He's got no manners . . . I ought to dance with her, don't you think?"

He looked at her anxiously as if her opinion were of the greatest moment, taking it for granted that it was Davida with whom he would naturally dance, involving her in a tacit understanding. And she could not repudiate it, she did not want to. They had an instinctive accord with each other. When she looked at him critically with her eyes alone, she found him a small, neat, rather plain man with unusual eyes, but after a little she did not look at him that way; he became no longer a person, but a personality.

"I do think you ought to dance with her," she answered.

"So be it," said Lill.

Really Alice was being very tiresome. She was being arch and leaning against Pelham when she talked to him. She leant against him and then drew back, and then pretending to be all unaware of it, leant against him again. And she *would* talk. Presently Davida, sitting silent and smoking, saw Archie dancing with Miriam Davis. He



blushed and nodded awkwardly. Alice smiled at him defiantly, leant affectionately towards Pelham and rolled her eyes at him.

Pelham stood up: "Dance this with me, Mrs. Bruce?"

Davida nodded and they went on to the crowded floor.

"I say," murmured Pelham, "can't you give that girl a hint not to behave like that? It makes me look a perfect fool!"

Davida laughed ruefully. "I'll try . . . but you know, it's not altogether her fault . . . she's got an inferiority complex. . . ."

"Yes," said Pelham, "but that doesn't help me. Can't you ever come up without her?"

"No, I can't," said Davida flatly.

"It seems a pity . . . when Lill gets his house built, won't you ever be able to come over without her?"

"I don't suppose so. . . ."

"Gawd," he rejoined, "won't that be nice for Lill!"

"Don't be silly," she said stiffly.

"But that girl is too much. You know, seriously, she's a positive incubus. Everybody would like you to come to things, but it rather puts them off if you have to bring her with you always."

"It's remarkably kind of you to say so," said Davida. "But, firstly, you take it for granted that I am pining in desolation and longing to be invited out, which is not so; secondly, you seem to forget that she is my sister-in-law."



"Oh, I say . . ." he grinned disarmingly, "don't chew me up . . . you're looking all old-fashioned. I was really only moaning about my bad luck . . . I do want you to come and dance with me sometimes."

"Well, in any case, don't be such a pig about Alice."

"I won't," he assured her earnestly. "I'll be an angel to her. But honestly, it's rather hard to be used as a sort of bat in the eye for Archie Mayne. . . ."

"Oh, damn it," thought Davida, "there's nothing in this beastly colony that everybody doesn't know about!"

"They're engaged," added Pelham, unofficially. "Archie and Miriam, I mean. The Maynes are as pleased as punch."

"They would be," said Davida.

When they got back to the table, Archie nervously came up.

"Hullo," he said.

"Hullo," said Davida.

Alice affected to just become aware of him.

"Why . . . hullo," she said.

Archie smiled anxiously.

"It's ages since I've seen any of you," he said.

"Ages!" murmured Davida sweetly.

"Do come over and see us some time," he went on with a noble attempt to be natural and unconscious of Alice.

Alice said, apropos of nothing: "We're having a wonderful time . . . Davida's chaperoning me."

"Er . . . splendid," said Archie weakly.

The band broke riotously into jazz, and a glint of relief flashed into Archie's set smile.

"I say," he said to Davida, "I'm afraid I can't butt in and ask you to dance . . . but I'm alone with Mir—Miss Davis, and I don't like to leave her."

"We couldn't dance, anyway," interrupted Alice. "We're in a party."

But later, while Davida was dancing with Lill, and Pelham, not so keenly aware of his obligations towards his partner as Archie, had mumbled some excuse and gone off to dance with a girl in another party, Alice sat still and looked at the shuffling crowd of dancers. She felt rather queer, detached, several things she wanted to say got a little jumbled before they reached their audience, and now she saw the swaying crowd through a sort of haze. "Smoke," she said to herself, slowly and carefully, "smoke, that's what it is." She did feel odd. She could feel her eyes turning after people rather stiffly, and the room swam mazily. She lolled back in her chair and fanned herself with a serviette.

Davida saw her with a quick discomfort.

"What's the matter with Alice?" she murmured to Lill.

He glanced at Alice and hesitated.

"I don't know . . . she looks rather . . . rather . . ."

"Tight," said Davida tersely. "We'd better go and look after her."

Alice continued to look and wave her serviette as they came up.

"S'hot!" she observed.

"Yes, it is rather," said Lill. "Let's go outside where it's cool."

She considered the suggestion with owlish gravity.

"All . . . right," she said at length, "but wheresh Douglas Pelham?"

"Oh, he'll come after us . . ." said Lill.

An obstinate look settled on her face . . . "No . . . wait for him," she said.

"Oh, my God," said Davida under her breath, "we'll never get her out!"

At that moment Alice stopped waving the serviette. She had suddenly become aware that the floor was heaving under her, leaving a dreadful sensation of nothingness when it dropped away. And then it heaved dizzily upwards. . . . She went a pallid green colour, and felt for the table as she staggered up.

"Feel shick," she muttered.

Davida gripped her arm.

"Come along," she said shortly.

Lill caught the other arm and they supported her down the endless room. People looked at them curiously, one or two whispered to each other.

"Pray heaven," said Davida under her breath, "she lasts till the cloakroom."

But Alice did not last.

v

They got a bedroom for her, and there, after half an hour, Davida left her asleep.

Lill was waiting in the hall.

"All right now?" he asked.

"She's asleep."

"Oh . . . well . . . Pelham has seized the opportunity to tack on to another party . . . so what shall we do? Go back and dance?"

"No, thanks," said Davida.

She stood still and frowned at the door of the lounge.

"You know," she said, "it was too frightful, but the stupid little idiot has never had anything to drink before . . . if I'd only thought of it I'd have told her not to have anything, but she'd probably have resented it."

She gave an angry little laugh. "But really," she added, "it's rather grim."

"It's unfortunate," said Lill, "but I've known it happen before, even at Government house."

"I don't see how we're going to get her home."

"Oh, we'll wait until the rest of the people have gone and then, if she's still asleep, we'll carry her down to the car. Don't worry. . . ."

He was beautifully calm and impersonal. He made everything seem simple.

"Get a cloak," he added, "and let's go and sit on the terrace."

## VI

They sat for a long time on the moonlit terrace, watching the black shadows move slowly across the tiled floor.

Very faint and far away was the sound of the band. They talked enthusiastically . . . starting with houses on the veldt and ending up with God and morals. They agreed that morals were the result of civilization, of convenience, of social necessities . . . They both shrank, alarmed, from the idea of eternity. It was a satisfying orgy of talk. But Davida, who had accused Pelham of conversational flirtation, did not recognize the more finished product as such when used by Lill.

She was saying . . . "I'm not sure that a complete finish isn't a good hope . . . and then something inside me rebels blindly at the idea . . ." when Pelham's voice came from one of the French windows opening on to the terrace.

"Lill . . . Where are you?"

"Damn," said Lill softly and unhurriedly.

Davida answered.

"You're the limit, you two," observed Pelham cheerfully. He was evidently in great form. "I've been looking everywhere . . . the highways and by-ways. The dance is over . . . the last reveller has departed . . . what are we going to do now?"

"Depart also I should imagine," said Davida.

"Well . . . come downstairs and have a drink and I'll get the car."

"We are a little sensitive on the subject of drinks," said Lill.

"Oh, Gawd, yes . . . where is she?"

"In bed," said Davida briefly.

"Oh, well, come and have a drink and then we'll get her into the car. Carry her tenderly . . . something with care . . . rumti-ti-tumpty young and so far."

"You're excessively bad form at times," said Lill in his peculiar voice, that never told whether he was being serious or not.

"I'm always bad form after a *dîner dansant*," retorted Pelham.

They went downstairs to a lounge where most of the lights had been turned off and which had a melancholy and slightly raffish air. The chairs were all pushed back from the tables, just as they had been left by the departing dancers . . . and the big fire that had burned so cheerfully was nothing but grey embers.

A bored night porter brought whiskies and soda.

The atmosphere killed conversation.

Davida said after a few moments that she thought she had better go up and see if she could get Alice down.

"Right you be," said Pelham, "and if you want the car and help, let us know."

Davida went up to Alice.

Alice was lying on the bed and moaning.

"I've got an awful headache," she groaned.

"Well, you'd better try and get down to the car, and we'll get home as quickly as possible."

"I can't get home to-night," moaned Alice.

"Don't be an idiot," said Davida, "you must go home."

Alice gave a self-pitying sob.

"It's not a bit of good weeping," said Davida, "you've got to come home."

"You don't know how dreadful I feel. . . ."

"Well, anyway, however you feel, you're coming home. You can't drive down to-morrow dressed like that, and I'm certainly not going to face the morning dressed like this."

Alice half sat up, sank down again and pressed her hand to her head.

"I can't," she said thickly, "and in any case I can't face them."

"Oh, my God," said Davida furiously, "then what *do* you intend to do?"

"Tell them to go away," mumbled Alice, "and get a car from a garage."

"Oh, don't be idiotic . . . I don't suppose we could get a car at this time, anyway."

"Well, I won't go then. . . ."

She turned over on her face and wept.

"Ten thousand devils," said Davida and went downstairs again.

Lill was alone.

"Hullo," he said, "how is she?"

"She says she can't face you, and that she wants a car from a garage to drive down!"

"But, my dear child," said Lill. "I don't suppose we could get a car now . . . and in any case I don't like the idea of you driving down at this time with an Indian chauffeur."



"Perhaps Warwicker would drive us himself," said Davida.

They walked out of the hotel to avoid the studiously uninterested night porter.

"I don't know what to do," said Davida.

She was feeling desperately tired.

"Well, look here . . . do you mind going up again and seeing if you can persuade her? Tell her Pelham didn't notice anything and that she needn't bother about me. I just thought she was feeling ill. . . ."

"Oh . . . I'll try."

She went upstairs again.

Alice was sitting on the edge of the bed. Her eyes were swollen and her face flushed.

"Listen," said Davida, "Pelham didn't see anything, and you needn't worry about Mr. Lill . . . it won't make any difference to him . . . but if you don't damn well come home at once, I'll tell your father about it."

Something flashed into Alice's eyes, a fear and yet a defiance . . . but it faded into a sick shame.

"I'll come," she said huskily, "but you'll have to lend me the scarf you're wearing. . . . I'll . . . I'll put it round my face."

"All right."

Davida took off her scarf and Alice fumbled for it and wound it round her head and across her face. When she stood up, Davida held out a hand to help her, but she pushed it away and took hold of the bed post.

"I can walk by myself," she said sullenly, letting go

of the bed post, and walking slowly to the door and down the passage.

"And that's that," thought Davida as she walked after her.

Pelham had got the car in front of the hotel. Alice got in without a word and Davida followed her. Lill sat in front with Pelham.

The moon was high and solitary in the sky, the veldt pale and calm, and the car slipped through the night, mocking the ghosts of long dead oxen that had plodded over the place, when it was nothing but a faint track leading into the unknown.

## VII

The sun was sending heralds in rose-coloured tabards into the sky when they arrived at the homestead. No one was about. The house had the withdrawn, defenceless look that houses have in the early dawn, before anyone is awake in them. It was lonely in the freshness.

Alice, still holding the scarf across her face, stood up and got out of the car, ignoring Lill's proffered help. Pelham sat still in the driver's seat. Alice walked away without looking at any of them. On the veranda she waited for Davida.

Lill took Davida's hand, and she was conscious again of that impalpable thread of understanding between them.

"I'm starting building at once," he murmured.

"Cheerio," said Pelham and yawned mightily; "come along next time."

"Thanks," said Davida, "but there won't be a next time."

She went up the veranda steps as the car drew away, the cloak trailing in the sandy dust. No one was awake in the house except herself and Alice . . . it was so quiet that she became conscious of her heart beating. Then Alice shrugged her shoulders and stumbled wearily into the house. Davida went along to her bedroom. She felt wretchedly lonely. . . .

Charles was asleep. When people were asleep, how far away they seemed, how unaware of life! It was dreadful that her loneliness did not penetrate to Charles's consciousness. . . . He was away . . . far away.

She undressed, letting her clothes drop on to the floor and got into her own bed . . . and suddenly she began to cry, hopelessly and helplessly . . . for no reason but the loneliness. But she had never felt lonely before . . . never before. . . .

Charles stirred and flung out an arm.

"What's the matter?" he muttered drowsily, "have a good party?"

She put her head under the bedclothes and crushed the sheet against her distorted mouth.

Charles's hand became limp and he slept again, hardly aware that he had awakened.

"Oh damn—damn—damn—" sobbed Davida, "what a perfectly horrible party."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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### I

DAVIDA slept on till lunch-time. She was wakened by Charles, who came and sat on the end of her bed, and violently shook her foot.

"Party or no party," he said as she sleepily protested, "the Old Man thinks that lunch-time is ample for the effects to have worn off."

"Is it lunch-time?" she asked incredulously.

"It is."

She stretched and realized that her eyes felt sore and tired.

"What a sight I must look!" she yawned.

"You look more of a wreck than a mere party should account for," Charles informed her.

She laughed: "You've got a horrible mind, Charles."

"Not at all . . . by the way what's the matter with Alice? She's been up since breakfast, wandering about with a boiled-owl look, and quite a new brand of pose . . . tragic and still. And she stared at the Old Man with a kind of ghoulish curiosity . . . what *were* you up to last night?"

"I don't know. . . ."

She got out of bed and pulled on her dressing-gown.

"We didn't have a very good time," she said over her shoulder.

Charles pulled out a pipe and began to fill it. He had been trying to formulate some way of telling Davida why he stayed on with the Old Man, but the words seemed to stick just behind his teeth. She looked so small and young in her dressing-gown, with a cigarette stuck in the corner of her mouth, her grey eyes tired and sleepy . . . her short hair ruffled. . . . He wanted to kiss her . . . He wished to God Alice was out of the way . . . why didn't that fool Archie marry her and take her away? Without her the Old Man would be quite different . . . A rotten sort of marriage for her . . . If he had known how the Old Man had changed while he was away in England, would he have asked Davida to marry him? . . . Would he have had enough guts to tell her about it . . . or enough guts to have come back to the Old Man without her? All he wanted to do was to farm and scribble and have Davida . . . If he had told her about his mother and Alice in England, would she have married him? . . . Probably. But if he had added that "as a result my father occasionally gets blind drunk . . . and when he's sober, Alice maddens him and he doesn't like women?" She might have! . . . But it hadn't seemed so important in England . . . He had forgotten how on the veldt things became intensified . . . and he had not known how the Old Man had changed. . . . He had not thought that old scandal could affect Davida . . . that its tentacles were so

strong . . . so far-reaching. Almost, in England, when he *had* thought about it, he had persuaded himself that with the years it was fading . . . And he had wanted to forget it . . . He had forgotten, too, the eternal gossip that went on . . . probably Davida had heard the story. There was plenty of chatty women to enlighten her . . . She probably wondered why he hadn't told her before . . . But the story filled him with a sick, shy misery. To tell it, even to Davida, seemed to make the very distant past into a very recent event. The Old Man had lived all his life with that story . . . the memory had bitten into his brain. He fought it with brandy, and his indomitable will that would not allow him to show for one moment, even to his son, the gnawing hurt, his lacerated pride. His reticence, his cold scorn hooked Charles to him as no appeal could have done.

Davida put her cigarette down on the edge of the dressing-table.

"Perhaps Alice is just disappointed," she suggested.

"Perhaps," said Charles.

The effort of recapitulating Alice's behaviour appalled her. The memory, as it grew clearer, was too repellent.

"I'm growing old, Charles," she said, "parties no longer thrill me . . . last night was dull."

"Well," he said, "what do you think of Lill? Likely to be a better neighbour than Templeman?"

She half-turned. "I was terribly fond of the Templemans . . . I miss them. . . ."

The old resentment filled her. If only she could have

done something for Lydia . . . she might have still been here. If only Charles had been on his own, so that she could have asked him to help. . . .

"I know," said Charles, "but somehow I never liked him . . . weak spot somewhere. . . ."

"I suppose you prefer that little reptile Barry?"

"No . . . I dislike Barry. But, good Lord, Davida, is it worth quarrelling about . . . I never objected to your spending most of your time there."

"It's not that . . . it's this . . . they were my friends . . . and I always felt that if I could have helped them they could have pulled through . . . and I couldn't help them. . . ."

"Why didn't you ask me?"

"Because you couldn't do anything without asking your father, and I didn't want their affairs discussed with him. It was horrible, not being able to do a thing just because you weren't your own master. . . ."

He flushed darkly.

"Damn it . . . if it was simply a question of money, you know damn well I could have done something."

"Well, it wasn't only money. Oliver wanted a helping hand throughout . . . someone to put him in the way of making some money. . . ."

"That's the trouble . . . he never would have made any. It wouldn't have been any good helping him . . . he'd have wanted helping again in six months. And what's more, Lydia knew it. . . ."



"Whether or no," said Davida, "I couldn't even offer to help. . . ."

"What did you want to do?" he inquired, "subsidize him?"

"No . . . but I couldn't do anything."

Oh, what was the good of quarrelling over it? They were gone. Their farm was sold . . . But though they were already dreamlike, the memory of her impotence stung. The fact that Old Barneveldt had offered to do what she should have been able to do, rankled.

"Oh, never mind," she said, "it doesn't matter."

## II

Alice looked dreadful. She was white and puffy round the eyes. She ate lunch distractedly and in the middle gave an abrupt sob which caused the Old Man to stare at her with sarcastic concern. At Davida she did not look at all.

"And what did you think of Salisbury dances?" asked the Old Man.

"Well, it's amusing," said Davida.

He grinned at her through his beard.

"You both seem to have found it exhausting," he observed.

"To those accustomed to a rural existence, anything urban is exhausting," explained Davida.

"But not, I should have thought, sufficiently exhausting to induce sobs," said the Old Man.

"One can weep from exhaustion," said Davida. "Alice got up too early."

He looked at Alice sourly.

"No one who cannot look more or less fit to be seen the following day, should go to dances," he said; "to look as Alice does is as bad as a young man who cannot carry his liquor decently!"

"People in glass houses—" said Alice unexpectedly and then blanched.

The Old Man regarded her with interest.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to explain that very cryptic remark," he said.

Alice stared sullenly at her plate.

There was a moment's silence. Charles leant back from the table and lit a cigarette. He was very white about the nostrils and his smile was a replica of the Old Man's.

"Apparently," said the Old Man, "an answer is not to be vouchsafed us."

Alice looked at him with glittering eyes.

"You can think what you like," she said in a difficult voice, as if her tongue were stiff, "nothing you or Charles can do can hurt me, not anything. . . ."

"Indeed?" said the Old Man silkily.

"You make me tired, Alice," said Charles. "I suppose you made a fool of yourself last night!"

"For Heaven's sake," said Davida nervily, "let her alone!"

"When I have heard exactly what did happen last night," said the Old Man, "Alice can come and explain her remark to me. If Davida does not choose to tell us, I have no doubt there are other sources of information."

"Hasn't Davida told you already?" said Alice rudely. "I should have thought she would have seized the first opportunity to tell her beloved Charles. . . ."

"I think you must be a little mad, Alice," said Davida.

Alice pushed her chair back from the table and gave a theatrical laugh. . . .

"The sins of the fathers," she said dramatically, and walked out of the room.

"What was it," asked Charles, "an imaginary slight, or Mayne?"

Davida did not answer; instead she lit a cigarette.

In the silence that followed a go-away bird called hoarsely and the cooing of a solitary dove reminded her suddenly of the scuttering, scratching noise that the pigeons at Thorogood's store made slipping down the sloping tin roof.

The Old Man stood up. His nostrils were dilated and his eyes were a deep, shining blue. She had an irrational feeling that he might commit murder and regarded the possibility with detachment. Only, she wondered, what would Charles do?

"Perhaps your wife will tell *you*," he said to Charles, and went ponderously on to the veranda.

"Come on, Davida," said Charles, "she can't be allowed to get away with this sort of thing."

"I don't see why she shouldn't, if she can," retorted Davida.

"She will exceedingly regret it," said Charles, and he greatly resembled his father.

"Look here," said Davida, "I'll tell you, because you're sure to hear about it . . . but do be decent about it!"

Briefly she outlined the story.

"The little bitch . . ." said Charles grimly.

Davida flushed.

"It was an accident. She didn't realize what was happening . . . she wasn't having a very good time . . . and possibly she thought it would look silly if she didn't take anything . . . and being inexperienced. . . ."

"Inexperienced be damned," said Charles furiously, "did you make an exhibition of yourself the first time you went out?"

"No . . . but . . ."

"There's no but about it . . . don't you see what people will say?"

Davida saw very clearly what they might say. It struck her as having a sort of poetic justice.

"You can hardly blame Alice if people infer it's in the family," she said tersely.

Charles went quite white. He thrust back his chair violently.

"She's the cause of every damn thing," he almost shouted.

"My dear Charles . . . don't exaggerate!"

It was horribly hot and still. Davida sat on because

she felt that if she stood up, her knees would give way. She felt that in some obscure way the situation was funny and that if only she could find the humour of it, the whole affair would dissolve into laughter and its proper proportions. But while she was still vaguely groping for the obscure germ of humour, Charles went out of the room after his father.

"Charles," she called urgently, "Charles . . . don't tell him just now!"

But he didn't answer, and she heard his footsteps receding down the veranda to his father's room.

She stood up with some idea of going to see Alice and standing between her and the oncoming storm, but the sound of a galloping horse caught her attention and she went instead to see who it was.

It was Barry, hatless, his face blackened and his eyes red-rimmed and sore. He flung himself off his horse and ran towards her.

"Where's Bruce?" he shouted. "He's wanted . . . badly!"

"Charles!" she called evenly.

Barry was gasping and mopping at his sore eyes with a blackened handkerchief.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"That infernal idiot, Templeman," snapped Barry, "couldn't even burn his fireguards properly . . . his whole farm's alight and it's coming this way. It's out of hand now . . . I nearly got cut off. If you don't want to be burnt out yourselves, you'd better get busy. . . ."

She ran to the Old Man's room and flung open the door. Charles was leaning against the table and smoking, the Old Man was lying back in a long chair.

"Barry's here," she cried, "he says the whole of Templeman's place is alight and coming down this way."

The Old Man jumped up. Charles pushed past her on to the veranda.

"What the devil . . ." she heard him say.

The Old Man came to the door and stood looking down on her.

"We have nothing to say this time," he observed, "we haven't burned our guards yet."

He grinned at her and went off after his son.

### III

Over in the direction of Oliver's farm hung great clouds of grey smoke, streaked and stained by a lurid red. They billowed up against the deep, clear blue of the sky, rolling and coiling like the crimson pall of a sacked town. It gave Davida a sick, cold feeling in the pit of her stomach. As if from a great distance she heard Charles shouting for the "boys," and as if from behind a sheet of glass watched them running down the track. Barry went after them on horseback, and a minute afterwards Charles and the Old Man rode past. She was left alone behind the pane of glass.

The grey battalions of smoke rolled perceptibly nearer

and suddenly the pane of glass seemed to dissolve and there was an acrid, frightening smell in her nostrils. The streaks of red were shooting flames now, licking up through the billowing grey blanket, shooting hungry, greedy tongues towards the sky. And above the smoke were flying sparks.

"In a moment, in a moment," shrieked a panic-stricken voice inside her, "Charles and the Old Man, Barry and the 'boys' will come running back, running from the suffocating, hungry blanket, blackened and panting. . . ."

"And this is the end . . ." screamed the voice. . . .

She ran down the veranda steps and out on to the track towards the Templemans'.

There was a horrible cracking in the air and waves of heat surged towards her. The bush was on fire. Her mind was working frantically as she ran. There was the little river . . . an absurd little strip of sluggish water. The fire would jump it easily. How many natives were there? They might make a stand at the river . . . it was the only place.

There they were!

It was like some fantastic frieze. The black bodies like frantic dancing figures against a wall of flame. They held heavy branches in their hands and beat frenziedly at the advance-guards of fire. And the air was full of smoke and heat, flying bits of red-hot grass . . . and an acrid, stifling smell. The fire rolled on, the dancing figures falling back before it, beating, gasping, sweat pouring off glistening ebony bodies. Charles's shirt was



in ribbons, blackened and scorched. And an old man with matted, grimy hair and beard, sweated and panted and beat at the crackling, roaring wall, an old man from whose cracked lips came strange oaths and blasphemies while the others fought in silence.

She became one of the dancing figures. She soaked her coat in the little river and beat blindly in the hot breath of the furnace. She became an automaton, beating and gasping.

They fell back over the river and for a moment there was a breathing space, before the fire jumped, turning the listless reeds to blackened stumps.

Later, she noticed vaguely that there were more people, other blackened, panting figures, antic in a burning world. Her tongue seemed swollen and she could hardly see. Her heart thumped with great, slow beats, and she felt suffocated. Long ago her soaked coat had dried and turned into part of the consuming flame. She had picked up a branch from somewhere. . . .

Once, close by her, someone gave a choking gasp and muttered: "It's no good . . . better beat it to Barneveldt's . . . he's got guards burnt. . . ." But they went on beating furiously.

And for herself she was sure it was the end. She and Charles, the Old Man and Alice, and the other grotesque figures dancing in a world of fire would drop soon into the red-hot heart of the world and be shrivelled cinders . . . nothing more. But in the meantime, she beat

at the advancing end savagely and wildly, her arms moving like flails.

"God . . . oh, God . . . God . . ." someone sobbed in the smoke.

And suddenly a hoarse voice cried: "The wind's changed!"

The wall of smoke and flame checked and wavered. The great pall of smoke rolled backwards. Flying red-hot grass stung her face and hands.

She stumbled blindly forward on to the black, spark-stung waste as someone caught her off her feet and lifted her up.

## I V

When she drifted back to consciousness she was in her own bed and aware of a smarting, painful face. Alice was fumbling about the room and the curtains were drawn. The light was soft and diffused.

She sat up.

"Hadn't you better lie down?" said Alice nervously. "Do lie down!"

"Why should I?" said Davida. "Where's Charles?"

"Oh, he's—he's . . . do lie down, Davida, it's bad for you. . . ."

"Don't be a fool," snapped Davida, driven to temper by alarm.

"Charles is . . . well . . . he's hurt . . . I mean . . ."

Davida got out of bed, staggered slightly, pushed the solicitous Alice aside and went out of the room.

Charles was lying on the veranda. One leg was twisted uglily and his face was white through the black streaks, his eyes red and his eyebrows singed.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," said Davida.

Charles made a feeble attempt to smile. His smile swam up to her like the smile of a man drowning in an ocean of pain.

"Don't touch him," said a hoarse voice, and she became aware of the Old Man lowering over her, his face drawn and his eyes suffused.

"But what happened?"

She dropped on her knees beside Charles.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," she whispered again.

Before her there stretched a black and agonizing loneliness, the loneliness that would be hers if Charles died.

Above her head a voice said: "A tree fell on him; young Barneveldt's gone to get a doctor."

"But it will take hours to get a doctor," she cried. "Can't we do anything in the meantime?"

"Don't worry," murmured Charles.

Barry came on to the veranda, followed by Mac carrying towels and a basin. He carried a bottle of olive oil himself.

"Look here, Mrs. Bruce," he said abruptly, "I think you'd better go away. I'm going to try and set that leg."

"I'll stay," said Davida obstinately.

"Rather you went," said Charles in a painful, strangled voice.

"Go right away," said the Old Man in an authoritative yet almost sympathetic voice.

"All right," she said reluctantly.

She hated women who made things worse by inopportune displays of affection and sympathy. There were times, obviously, when however much you loved a person, that person would prefer a stranger. Especially when they were going to be hurt. It made it worse to feel that by being hurt, you were hurting someone else. In that moment she hated, and yet almost loved, Barry. Hated him because he was going to hurt Charles unspeakably, and almost loved him because of his cool competence.

Her upper lip behaved in a queer, undisciplined manner. It twitched, although the rest of her face was controlled.

"All right," she said again, and stood up.

"Barneveldt will get the doctor on the nearest phone," said Barry, in a matter-of-fact tone. "You look as if you could do with his attentions yourself."

## V

She went, unconscious of her own appearance and smarting face, out at the back and down the track towards the wheat. Half-way there she sat down under a mimosa tree and put her fingers into her ears. And

still, in her imagination, she could hear Charles groan, could see the little beads of sweat break out on his scorched face. She set her teeth as if she herself were suffering physical pain, and inside she felt the retching horror of steeling oneself against agony.

After what seemed like an eternity, she relaxed, and tears spilled out of her eyes, running hot and stinging down her face. She had no handkerchief and dabbed at them with the back of her hand. Then she got up and went back to the house, to be met by Barry with that maddening, artificial cheerfulness that the medical profession assume after an unpleasant and painful thing has been accomplished.

"Well, we've fixed that, Mrs. Bruce."

It was probably the same manner that he wore after doctoring some wretched animal. Her dislike of him flared up again.

"Is he all right?" she asked stiffly.

"Well, as far as we know . . . so long as there's no internal trouble. We'll have to wait for the doctor."

She went on to the veranda. Barry had certainly fixed things up. Charles's eyes looked at her from a mask of cotton wool. His hands and arms, too, were covered with cotton wool, and over his leg, straight now and bound between splints by towels, was an improvised cage of wicker. His eyes were pale and cloudy; pain seemed to have drained the colour from them.

She realized that under the muffling wool, he smiled at her, and it reduced her to weak tears again.

The Old Man was sitting near, smoking as usual, nonchalant as usual; but when she looked at him she saw that he seemed older and that two deep lines were engraved on either side of his nose, running down to his chin. He seemed to have escaped fairly lightly. His beard was singed and his face looked sore, but underneath the soreness was a leaden pallor. His eyes seemed to look inward at some dreary thought. He did not speak to her, but after a moment she leant down and kissed the top of Charles's head.

"I'm going to wash," she said.

Everything had begun to take on the quality of a nightmare in which the dreamer knows vaguely that it is a nightmare and waits for the awakening, and yet fears (and so adds to the nightmare) that there will be no awakening, and the horror will meander into eternity. The wretched fear that there might be something more than burns and a broken leg nagged at her, and when she tried to put it aside and think reasonably, her mind roamed uneasily upon possibilities. What would she do first if anything frightful happened?

Alice was still sitting in her bedroom. She looked frightened and ashamed. She said nothing, only sat there with her hands clasped tightly together and stared at her feet.

Davida, always a respecter of other people's reticence, said nothing and went over to the wash-hand stand. She bathed her face and fumbled with shut eyes for a towel. Alice jumped up and handed it to her. Alice continued

to stand by her while she patted her face with the towel, and then, as she turned towards the mirror, Alice spoke in a jerky, nervous voice.

"Davida," she said, "what do they all think of me?"

Davida stared at her. How excruciatingly egotistic she was! For what should anybody be thinking about her at this time?

"What on earth do you mean?" she asked.

A painful dull red crept over Alice's face.

"I mean . . . well, of course, you know. I mean for running away."

"Did you run away?" said Davida indifferently.

"Yes, I did," said Alice fiercely, "and if you don't know it now, you soon will. I—I lost my head and bolted over towards the Barneveldts."

"Oh," said Davida.

She was feeling as if her head was severed from her body and was swimming in a warm, close room. From far away her brain telegraphed to her: "How like Alice to think that everybody has nothing else to do but think about her all the time, stupid! I don't suppose anyone even knows or cares what she is doing."

"And when I got there," said Alice in the tight-strained voice of confession, "and I felt safe, I felt ashamed and pretended that I'd been sent over to fetch help and they brought me back with them in the cart."

And almost immediately she began to regret her hysterical impulse to tell the truth. She thought that perhaps no one would have guessed; the whole thing might have



been carried off as something rather brilliant on her part, if only she hadn't given way to that weakness for sensation, that mania for focussing attention on herself at all costs. Especially since Davida was one of those clam-like people who never told anybody anything, and never indulged in reproaches. Reproaches she could have borne. They would have enabled her to justify herself with emotional excuses. But Davida sat down rather wearily on the bed and seemed not at all interested.

"I could have killed myself when I saw you all coming on to the veranda," she added huskily.

"Oh, no," said Davida, speaking in a dreamy, bored voice, "you just thought of that as being what you ought to have felt."

But Alice rose even to that.

"You're quite right," she said in broken accents; "it's quite true. I'm utterly hopeless."

"Yes," said Davida stonily, "it's unfortunate."

[The thin thread of sympathy had snapped very easily.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

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### I

WITH the doctor came Mark Lill. He came in his own car so that he could make himself useful if an extra car were needed. There was something incredible in the sight of the two cars jolting through the blackened landscape, which, shorn of its enveloping tall grass, appeared strange and frightening. A little smoke still drifted over it in the evening glow, and the wind still stirred little puffs of powdered grass. It was like the hell of Davida's Bible with its flames put out, and deserted by its demon stokers. Uncanny and desolate. A wagon with sixteen oxen straining and pulling across the veldt would have been more suitable. Two cheap American cars were anachronisms in that ancient waste. There was in the strain and the pull, in the heavy breathing and sweating hides of the oxen, something akin to the soil. They had ever been, and would ever be. The cars were like shiny beetles, ludicrous, fit to make the ancient gods laugh, and yet they came on, rocketing through the drifts, skidding and slithering over the sandy track.

Ever since she had left Alice and returned to the veranda, Davida had sat by Charles, while Old Bruce smoked cigar after cigar. And the time passed like long

heart-beats. Barry had gone off, promising to be back by sundown, and the sunlight had an empty quality. Davida had the impression that she was sitting in a void, cut off from the world. Nobody spoke. Charles seemed half-unconscious, and moaned at intervals. The Old Man's silence was strained and antagonistic.

Sitting there, Davida felt that her thoughts flew about inside her head like birds, swooping and soaring like them, but without their purposeful flight. The Templemans . . . Alice . . . the Old Man . . . the Maynes . . . whirled about in her head without reason or pattern. Taking it all in all, she thought, making a determined effort to reason things, it had been a pretty futile affair. Drifting on from day to day and month to month, without principle, without actually doing anything. In every way she had let things go. She had allowed herself to be involved in an uneasy alliance with Alice, had allowed Alice to colour her relations with Charles. And why? She didn't like Alice. She didn't think she deserved any support. It was just that she had felt obliged to protest . . . had felt that if she did not protest she would be actually aiding and abetting the Old Man. The prevailing inertia had somehow crept into her veins, and had circulated through her whole body, and into her brain. The veldt was like an opiate . . . it spread a veil over one's perceptions. Nowhere else would she have consented to live in such an atmosphere, but somehow there was an inevitability about things on the farm. And even now it was an effort to decide, if she would be

allowed to decide what to do about Charles. Her will had become flabby. She had let the Templemans slide away without much effort. And now . . . she was only conscious of an aching unhappiness, a dread for Charles that was only emotional. Her mind did not enter into it. She could not tell for certain if it were real, if she loved him, or whether it were just sympathy and the sudden disruption of an ingrained habit. Charles had been part of her life, a kind of subconscious part. But for a long time there had been nothing vital between them, nothing clear-cut and certain; their minds had not met.

The afternoon had merged into the evening. The hard, metallic blue of the sky which had hung above them like a shield became softer. Smudges of orange and purple hung low when the two cars appeared. The sight of them gave her a quick stab of apprehension. She had acquiesced for so long. Would the Old Man make arrangements, send Charles to Salisbury without consulting her, send him away without her? . . .

She stood up agitatedly.

The Old Man jabbed his cigar into an ashtray and went to the veranda entrance as the two cars crunched up to the house.

Dr. Featherstone got out, lifted his bag from the seat, and came towards them.

"Well, you seem to have had a pretty stiff time," he said cheerfully.

Behind him Lill stood irresolutely by his car.

Old Bruce nodded.

"Come in and look at the boy," he said.

The unfamiliar phrase stabbed at Davida. She had not thought of Charles as a boy for so long, and had never thought his father capable of regarding him as a boy. They had seemed equals . . . ageless with each other.

The doctor, a nondescript-looking man, whose hair was patchy and bleached, and whose eyes were deep-set and rather tired, walked on to the veranda. He opened his bag, and the smell of disinfectant and anæsthetic tickled Davida's nostrils and brought on the nervous memories of illnesses in houses when she was a child. That odd, frightened excitement. The feeling that the doctor was a mystery man, gifted with insight into things hidden from less-favoured mortals, a miracle-worker who sometimes failed.

She felt a little sick with nerves. Lill still stood outside, leaning against the car. She could not see Charles because his father stood in the way, but in any case she did not want to see him . . . it might interfere with the doctor's spells . . . witch doctors . . . magic. . . . What was there? An eerie black "land" under an awning of blue and gold; the quietude; the aged world; and a scream cutting through the silence with a sharp almost visible knife . . . a cheetah. Lill lit a cigarette. She wished she had one. She drew a deep breath. The doctor made a clicking noise with his tongue against his teeth. Charles gasped. . . .

Reality returned. The doctor spoke briskly with the hideous cheerfulness of his kind.

"That's all right . . . we won't bother you any more until we get you into hospital!"

Her head gave a sick thump. The doctor turned to the Old Man.

"We'd better get him straight in . . . fix up a stretcher in my car. Can't do more here than has already been done. Barry made a good job of it."

The inactivity gave place to activity.

Lill was called into consultation. He gave Davida his quiet consoling smile as he came in, and in his precise, gentle voice offered himself and all that he had.

Davida, tense and nervous, threw things into a suitcase for herself, and with exaggerated care packed a bag for Charles. At the back of her mind there was sheer funk lest the Old Man should suggest that she stay behind, that he go instead, and that she would not have the courage to refuse.

When she came out with the suitcases, Charles was already tied on to a home-made stretcher. Lill took the cases from her and put them in his own car. The doctor and the Old Man lifted the stretcher and carried Charles to the doctor's car. It took them a long time to get it in successfully, and at every jerk Davida bit her lip.

She suggested that she should go into the car and look after Charles, but the Old Man said tersely that he would do that. The doctor backed him up. "It wants someone who can hold it steady," he said.

She looked at the car. The stretcher had been lashed in with its ends resting on the hood at the back of the front seats. There was only room for one.

"We'll drive close behind," said Lill in her ear.

The Old Man climbed ponderously into the car and settled himself down. Charles made no sign or sound.

"He's given him morphia," said Lill with that queer aptness of his which seemed as if he responded to his hearer's thoughts. Davida nodded.

Suddenly, on the veranda, appeared Alice, dishevelled and owl-eyed. She had been asleep. She came running up to the car.

"Where are you going?" she cried wildly, "you can't leave me behind!"

"If you had been doing something useful instead of sleeping," said her father in a rasping voice, "no doubt you would have been aware of what was happening and ready to come. It's too late now. We can't wait."

"Go on," he said to the doctor who had hesitated.

"Get into your car," he snapped at Lill, "and Davida, get in, too."

Alice gave a wailing cry and clutched at the car.

The Old Man knocked her hand away.

"Get on," he said to the doctor, "we can't risk anything because of a lazy, hysterical girl."

His voice galvanized the doctor into action. He threw in his gear, and the car moved away. Alice made another futile clutch at it, grasped it, slipped, and fell into the dust. Lill picked her up. He was quite unperturbed.



"I suppose," he said to Davida, "she will have to come with us?"

"I suppose so," she said reluctantly, "but we can't wait till she packs."

"No. . . ."

Without further ado he led Alice to the car, put her firmly and politely into the back seat, and equally firmly put Davida into the seat next himself.

The car slid forward into the luminous evening. The horn of the moon rose with startling suddenness over the slight rise where the bush had been, and flung a pale assegai of light over the charred *vlei*.

## II

"I suppose," said Mark, "that you will stay up for a time?"

Far ahead they could see the searchlight of the doctor's car as he drove along the curving track.

Davida nodded. Yes, she would stay in Salisbury quite definitely; whatever plans her father-in-law might have, she would stay. But she wondered what the Old Man did intend to do. He would be annoyed that they had brought Alice with them. And really, she didn't deserve any consideration. But with Lill beside her Davida felt released from that uneasy feeling that an alliance existed between Alice and herself. She had always been conscious of it. It was an alliance of defence between two unfriendly

nations. Neither liked nor trusted the other, but both were bound together by weakness. Whether such an alliance would have existed if Charles had not seemed bound by another uneasy alliance with his father, she did not know. Possibly not. It would have altered matters. Then it would have been as it was now with Lill; between them, she and Charles would have seen that Alice had fair play, and then not bothered themselves further. That was how she had felt this evening. She had not felt that Lill was filled with any personal interest or sympathy for Alice: he had merely done what he considered the decent thing to do. Obviously, she couldn't have been left. Nothing to get wrought up about. They just took her. There was something inexpressibly soothing about that utterly normal attitude. It put things in their true perspective at once. But when she was on the farm things got all out of proportion, things were not normal; and it was almost impossible to keep a normal outlook, to see things in their right degrees of importance. It almost degenerated into that tiresome, out-argued subject, sex antagonism; as if she and Alice were ranged against Charles and his father merely because they were males. "I," thought Davida, "find myself backing up Alice whether I approve of what she does or not, simply because the other two won't give her a chance; but in point of fact, I should feel the same if we were all of the same sex."

"You know," said Lill suddenly, "very few people in this world behave reasonably. They don't reason, they

don't think about cold facts; they are swayed by their emotions, and they don't attempt to stop it. 'It's wrong,' they say, 'because I don't like it.' Or they insist that people whom they personally don't like simply cannot do anything right. They live in a sticky mass of prejudices, and some people let themselves go to such an extent that it borders on mania."

He glanced at her and smiled.

"It's no good worrying about it," he added, "the only thing to do is to ignore them, and get ahead with what you think is right."

"It all sounds so simple," she murmured.

"It is simple, really. Besides, I don't believe in even passive resistance to steam-rollers. Get out of their way, or else you'll get hurt. What I mean is, that it's no good standing in front of a steam-roller and trying to push it back, and it's no good standing in front of it thinking that it will stop and will not run over you. And people who have got to a certain stage of emotional prejudice are like steam-rollers. So step out of their way and let them roll on. And, if necessary," he added in his most precise and prim tone, "lie. Do what you think you ought to do and then keep out of the way until the storm is over. It's the only way to deal with them."

"It's much easier when you are living in a town where you can get among other people, and so keep your sense of what you ought to do intact, and not be influenced by the people with whom you live. It's very difficult

when your whole world consists, apparently, of two or three people with a fixed idea."

"The Maynes are very normal," he observed.

"Yes, but . . . possibly owing to the fact that I have been getting my values all wrong, I don't go and see them. Probably for what you would call an emotional reason."

"Yes . . . I do call it that. You don't do yourself any good by cutting yourself off from the Maynes. If it did do any good, then it would be different. The Maynes think they are perfectly right and justified in everything they did or did not do, and you don't make them conscience-stricken; all you do is to make them feel that it is a pity that they don't see anything of you; that they're sorry you feel like that, but that it can't be helped. And they also feel that it's rather foolish and unnecessary. . . ."

Davida instinctively glanced over her shoulder.

"It's all right," said Lill composedly, "there's a glass windscreen between us. She can't hear."

His eyes were on the road ahead. The corners of his mouth were twisted into his rather impish smile.

"You know," he continued, "you claim to be a rationalist, but you're swayed by superstitions, emotional loyalties, and other unreasons!"

She did not answer, and they came to the river, lying like a sheet of silver under the moon. The car slid down the cutting and swished through the water, leaving it

churned and muddy, with dancing ripples spreading from bank to bank.

"Loyalties are funny things," he went on meditatively, "some are evolved from social necessities. Business loyalties are protective measures grown up from small beginnings until they have become instincts. The loyalties of people in one stratum of society are protective. They achieve something and have become dignified. But other loyalties are simply emotion, sentiment. They don't bind society together, they disintegrate it. Your latest loyalty is like that. It doesn't help anyone. It isn't reasonable, since frankly you cannot say that Alice was really badly treated. It would have been sheer imbecility for the Mayne boy to have married her simply because he once thought himself in love with her. She killed it herself. People get what they deserve, as a general rule."

"Yes, but . . ."

"There is no 'but' about it. She is one of those people who plop into love and wallow in emotion. She doesn't reason; she simply feels that it is quite sufficient for her to be in love, and that the mere fact that she is in love is an obligation on the part of the person with whom she is in love to love her. She doesn't consider she is under any necessity to make herself interesting or amusing, or to endeavour to see any other point of view. Adversity may arouse interest and pity, and even love, but it won't hold it unless the lover feels that the adversity is quite undeserved. Once let it be felt that there

is something to be said on the other side and the thin edge of the wedge of disillusionment is in."

"I know all that . . . but I felt that she never had a chance."

"Yes, you felt it. You didn't reason. She did have a chance. Archie Mayne was her chance. The more badly she was treated, the more determined he would have been to marry her and give her a good time . . . if she hadn't forced it on to his notice that there might be some adequate reason for things being as they were."

"I suppose it's true," she said.

As the lights of Salisbury appeared in the distance, she relapsed into silence. Mark Lill gave her confidence. His clear conception of the obvious course to pursue made it seem the easiest matter in the world to pursue it . . . when he was there, and when she was away from the tangled motivation of the farm. Obviously, the natural thing was for her to stay in Salisbury while Charles was in hospital: and as the car drew nearer and nearer to Salisbury, it became clearer and clearer that there could be no question about it being done. Life resolved itself into a beautiful simplicity. One did what was the right and usual thing to do.

### III

At the hospital Davida left Alice outside in the car with Mark Lill while she went in to hear about Charles. The matter-of-fact atmosphere there hardened her sense



of the simplicity of life. There, she seemed to have more place in Charles's life than she had on the farm. On the farm there had been the vagueness of Charles's own attitude, the doubt as to whether she or his father had the more right to him. At the hospital it was taken for granted that she was the more important of the two. It was to her they turned over minor questions of arrangement; it was to her they addressed their remarks. And there also the Old Man seemed to shrink, to become less ominous, less impressive. She realized for the first time how largely he had loomed over everyone at the farm. She said to herself grimly: "I'll see he never affects me in that way again . . . never again shall he affect my judgment." And again: "With Charles away from him things will be different. He affects Charles, too, clouds his outlook." She felt almost pleased as the doctor told her that he didn't think there was any trouble except with the broken leg, which would take some time to mend. That "some time" was what she wanted; she would make good use of it.

"I suppose it will be quite all right?" she asked. "I mean, there won't be any permanent effects?"

"No-o-o," said Dr. Featherstone, "I don't think so. I hope not. We'll have Trevon in to-morrow to have a look at him . . . but so far as we can tell, everything ought to be all right."

"I'll come to see him to-morrow morning."

"Yes, about twelve. He'll be all ready then."

She went up to see Charles then, but he was feverish



and vague, his eyes a brilliant blue between their bandages, and he did not seem to recognize her. She went away with the unhappy, unsatisfactory feeling that comes when you leave someone behind, as if the time between the leave-taking and the next meeting is time lost for ever.

The Old Man was waiting for her. He seemed unperturbed about Alice, merely remarking that she had better go straight to bed when they got to the hotel, as she was not fit to be seen. Davida had been unconsciously bracing herself to meet an angry scene, and when it didn't happen she felt limp and tired. But it gave her the idea that there was a lot in what Mark Lill said. It was better to do things and take it for granted that it was all right, than to worry and talk about it. The Old Man had taken it for granted that by not arguing he had got his own way, and they had got their own way by simply taking it and not arguing. And, as is often the case when the thing is done, the Old Man did not think it worth arguing about. But a faint doubt persisted as to whether it would work out quite so well on the farm. If, for instance, she did not return the oxen when he sent for them. . . . And, moreover, she had an inkling that Old Bruce was less likely to make himself objectionable in front of people, and further, in front of Lill, for whom, for some reason, he seemed to have a great respect. So, when they got to Meikle's, the Old Man suggested that they should have some supper, though firmly, politely, and on perfectly sound grounds, sent Alice off to bed.

And again, in the hotel, although he remained as bulkily tall as ever, he had lost the overpowering personality that had brooded over the homestead. It was obvious, also, why he still continued to be received in Salisbury. He beamed genially on people, and his manner was charming.

At supper he was rather quiet, sarcastic about the food, and amiable to Lill. He drank brandy and soda, and occasionally stared across the room with clouded eyes.

Lill talked easily. He deferred politely to the Old Man, but kept the conversation flowing. It flowed over Davida's head, and let her think. She wanted to reassure herself about Charles. Was the doctor quite sure about things? Surely it wasn't necessary to have another man in for a broken leg!

The Old Man was drinking heavily. She had never seen him actually drink before. He rolled the brandy round his tongue, and almost one could hear him purr. But his eyes became bluer and a little wild, and his sardonic smile punctuated the conversation at inappropriate moments.

Mark was talking about religion. Davida made an effort to put Charles out of her mind.

"I suppose," Lill said thoughtfully, "we all really hope there is a future life, even if we pretend not to. And if we do hope we must hope that it is different from this life. That's where I think the Spiritualists preach such an appalling doctrine. Think of going on to a repetition

of this life on more or less the same lines. Ghastly. . . .”

The Old Man’s sardonic smile had widened to a square grin. His mouth looked like the slit in a pillar-box. His eyes were staring.

“My dear Mr. Lill,” he said, “do not deceive yourself, or worry yourself, if by a future life you are thinking in terms of Heaven and hell . . . for *now* we are in hell, and our only hope is oblivion.”

He pushed the table violently back, and stood up.

“I can assure you,” he said, “I speak with complete assurance.”

He walked away from them, swaying slightly like a ship in a lazy swell.

He stopped at the door, and turned to the Indian waiter. He was still grinning. “Send a bottle of Martell up to my room,” he said.

Lill looked after him.

“You do have fun, Davida darling!” he said.

There was a sympathy in the Puck-like smile that made the flippancy a solace.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

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### I

THERE was no question about it. Charles would be in the hospital for some time . . . probably for months. His leg was causing a lot of trouble. No one was to blame. Even if a doctor had been on the spot it would have made no difference, but there it was. It wasn't satisfactory. It might have to be re-set. It might be permanently shorter than the other. The hip might be affected.

Charles shrugged his shoulders as he lay in bed.

"No good worrying before we know for certain. Let me have a mirror, Davida. I want to see what sort of an interesting invalid I am."

The bandages were off his face.

"Lord!" he observed, "I suppose I shall be fit to look at one day."

The bright tidiness of the ward was irritating, the deftness of the nurses maddening. They buzzed about as if nothing mattered except that the patients were washed at the exact moment . . . and they chattered cheerfully as if uncertainty were nothing.

"They're all right," said Charles, when Davida expressed her irritation, "they're keeping the patients' spirits up. Not letting 'em brood."

The Old Man had returned to the farm. He went two days after their arrival in Salisbury. He came up to town every week-end, but only for the day, leaving Alice on the farm. Alice, before she went with him, had made a frantic appeal to Davida, but Davida, resolved to drop that uneasy alliance, had declined to interfere. Before Alice's genuine misery her heart had almost failed her, but when all was said and done, what excuse could be put forward against the girl going back with her father, except the one that Davida would have liked her to stay and keep her company? And that would not have stood against the rejoinder that the Old Man also wanted her. In any case, Davida felt that that was not required of her.

"Look here," said Charles, "don't you brood either."

He began to bite the edge of his sheet, a habit he had acquired since he had been in hospital.

In spite of his adjurations, his own eyes were troubled and blank. The nurse had told her that he would lie for hours at a time staring up at the ceiling, biting his sheet, and suddenly pulling it out so that his teeth clicked together.

"He wants something to interest him," she added briskly, "something to take his mind off things when you are not here. He won't read. It's a little morbid."

Davida regarded her with a smouldering fury; she was so confoundedly brisk and professional.

"You might be a little morbid yourself if you might be going to be a . . . a . . . cripple," she retorted.

"Oh, now, Mrs. Bruce, you mustn't think like that.

It's exaggerating . . . he'll probably only be a little lame, and after a short time with crutches he'll be able to get about with a stick."

"Oh, my God! Don't be crass," said Davida, and went out of the shadowed hall into the glaring sunshine full of a sick revolt.

Now she watched him with a furrow between her eyebrows.

"I'm not brooding," she said. "I wish, though, that we could get you home. Hospitals are so very . . . well, institutional and boring."

He stopped biting the sheet, pulling it out with the little click that the nurse had mentioned.

"No, thanks, old thing," he said, "I don't think I'd like the farm just now."

"Well," she said desperately, "can't I get something that will amuse you?"

His jaw tightened.

"Halma or Ludo?" he inquired, "or shall I do crossword puzzles with the red-haired nurse?"

"The latter might pass the time," said Davida.

"Thanks, sweet one . . . but somehow I don't think it would. She has an amorous eye, and frightens me."

He looked at Davida and sighed.

"You're looking prettier than ever," he said slowly, "since you've been in town. Or is it only that I notice it more because I don't see so much of you?"

"It may be," she said lightly, "simply the little matter of different clothes."

He screwed up his eyes.

"No, I don't think so . . . you look as you used to look in England, as if you could cope with the world and still be cheerful."

"Which shows how deceptive appearances are, because if I had to cope with the world I shouldn't stay cheerful. I should first burst into tears, and then go into a lunatic asylum."

He started to bite the sheet again.

"When's the Old Man coming up?" he asked after a moment.

"Next Saturday."

A nurse appeared at the door.

"I'm afraid I shall have to turn you out now, Mrs. Bruce, he's got to be put to bed."

"That's her little joke," said Charles, "it's the hospital joke."

The nurse giggled at him. Evidently she greatly admired him.

"Oh, we always call the evening wash and brush up putting them to bed," she informed Davida.

"Highly amusing," said Davida.

At the door she looked back and blew him a kiss. He was biting the sheet again. His eyes were unnaturally blue and sunken, and he had got terribly thin. His fair, crisp hair looked dull. But he had a kind of haggard grace, and he looked younger than when he had been on the farm. He pulled the sheet away with a click, and smiled at her, as if he laughed at her and himself.



## II

There was a letter from Alice waiting for her at the hotel. It sprawled over six pages.

She read it in bits while she changed for dinner. She was dining with Mark Lill, and going to the theatre. A travelling company with someone quite well known in it was giving Salisbury a flying visit. It was sufficiently unusual to be exciting. But Alice's letter made her frown, and eventually sit down to read it over again. It was like the majority of her letters, wailing and reproachful.

"I suppose you're having a good time, and I'm stuck here, and father is perfectly terrible. You know he hates me. I do think you or Charles might ask him to bring me up sometimes. How is Charles, by the way? Aren't the doctors stupid, not knowing what's really the matter? But seriously, Davida, you might think of me. Sometimes I'm frightened, he's so odd. He drinks now at meal-times, and he's always sort of fuddled and queer. He looked at me the other evening after dinner with the most horrible smile, and said: 'You're really remarkably like your father.' Now, I'm not like him, am I? Charles is like him, but I'm not. I'm like my mother, thank goodness, though sometimes I wonder in the middle of the night whether I'm not rather like him in some ways. Oh, Davida, it's awful. Do you believe in heredity? Do you think people inherit other people's likes and dislikes?

By the way, Piet Barneveldt is always coming over. Father seems to like him and he does a lot for him on the farm now that Charles is away. He says they haven't much to do on their place now. Oh, by the way, father went down to the mealies the other day, and he came back swearing horribly. He rides round the farm sometimes and harries the 'boys.' He's got quite friendly with Piet Barneveldt. I shouldn't have thought he would have had anything to do with him. He asks him to lunch. He never used to do that to Douglas Pelham or Archie Mayne. . . ."

"Now, what on earth is going on down there?" thought Davida. That Alice considered it part and parcel of her father's general unpleasantness was obvious, but it seemed to Davida that there was something more than that. There was, she felt convinced, "something up." And instantly she began to worry. Although there were no reasonable grounds for her to feel any responsibility, she still felt it, much against her will, since apart from the anxiety about Charles, she was enjoying herself comparatively well in Salisbury.

She continued dreaming. If she stayed in Salisbury she would have to get some new clothes: at last her trousseau was being worn out. Her face was thoughtful as she brushed her hair. What a nuisance about Alice! And at such a time. Really, one could not go and bother Charles about it. But reason or unreason, she could not blandly ignore her uncomfortable presentiment that things were

distinctly wrong . . . almost menacing out there. She reacted violently. What sheer nonsense, sheer imagination! How could any person of sense and reason let herself be swamped by such emotional folly? But at the same time, could Piet Barneveldt, whom she really liked, be trusted to cope with the Old Man if he were really up to mischief? Far from it. Piet, who was pleasant, but simple, would probably abet the old brute.

She put Alice's letter away in a drawer and went downstairs to meet Mark. She seemed to live two separate existences. During the day she went to the hospital, worried about Charles, who put up a screen of indifference between them and would not let her approach his thoughts, though their hands met and clasped in passionate sympathy: and in the evening she met Mark with whom there were no reticences, and whose precise, clear mind seemed to be the exact balance to her own.

Mark met facts with calmness and put them in their places. His life seemed the epitome of pleasant reason. He was not blown hither and thither by chancy winds, nor would he bow down to circumstances. If Charles is really going to be lame, said Mark in effect, then something must be done about it, arrangements must be made. If he's going to be lame, it's perfectly sickening luck, but he'll probably leave the farm and take up some other interest. Didn't you say he wrote? Of course, it will take some time to readjust things, but they will be readjusted. And when he went to the hospital even

Charles seemed to come under the spell; he would stop biting his sheet, and discuss literature.

When Davida got into the lounge she found Douglas Pelham sitting with Mark. Since she had been in Salisbury she had stopped finding Pelham irritating. His general impertinence was relegated to the frivolous, in-offensive plane to which it belonged, and she regarded him now as a fairly average, quite amusing individual. He was going on to a party. Pelham, like a great many other people in Salisbury and elsewhere, only found life amusing in a party. He liked to identify himself with a favoured few who regarded the rest of the world as non-existent, and to talk proudly of the "Gang." They called themselves the "Gang" with a conscious humour to show that they were not to be confounded with the common meaning of gang, such as a gang of thieves or a gang of railway workers. Before they had been the "Gang" they had been the "Crowd," and before that, quite simply "Us." They went to dances together, to house-parties on farms together, and they never went out two by two . . . or if they did it was because it was an "affair." And they could not conceive of any two people of opposite sex going out together unless it were an "affair." So that Pelham quite obviously regarded Mark and Davida as an "affair." He treated them to that slightly humorous man-of-the-world manner considered correct by the "Gang," who prided themselves on their broad and modern minds. They were not to blame for this apparent narrowness of vision. Their interests consisted either of

back-chat and dancing, or of house-parties where they made apple-pie beds, threw cold water over each other, played hide and seek in pyjamas, and sang choruses to a ukulele. Discussion on any subject except personalities and scandal they designated inelegantly as "sloppy tripe." So that naturally, two people alone had no motive nor reason other than flirtation. They boasted one or two scions of noble families among them, and so there was no question but that their outlook on life was the correct one.

They shed the light of their approval on Mark and Davida, and would have been quite pleased to have had them as permanent adjuncts to their parties, but though Mark and Davida had attended one or two, they found them a little boring and preferred their own amusements, which consisted chiefly of arguments about religion and life; so the "Gang" bore them no ill-will but openly considered them an "affair."

"What are you two doing?" inquired Pelham. "I suppose you wouldn't like to blow along with us? We're going out to Mallin's place, taking some food and drink, and coming back at dawn. He's got a leopard around that has taken two of his dogs and makes nightly meals of those goat-like objects he calls sheep. So the girls are going to cook the supper while we strong men go out and get the marauder. Betty Thames says she is coming with us, that she can hit a leopard as well as any of us."

"Much as I should like to indulge in such manly sport," said Lill, "we are going to the theatre."

"Oh, Lord! it's something rather highbrow, isn't it? We thought of going, but put it off too long, and couldn't get seats. Oh, well, we shall be there till dawn, so if you want a romantic moonlight drive afterwards, come along."

"You forget," said Mark amiably, "that I am approaching an austere middle-age, and am even inclined to rheumatism."

Pelham grinned impertinently.

"Middle-age may be austere when you get there," he observed, "but I haven't noticed much austerity at the moment."

"But you are quite exceptionally unobservant," said Mark serenely.

Pelham departed and they went in to dinner.

"It seems so long since I have been in a theatre," said Davida, "that I am too excited to eat."

"In this country one merely eats to live," said Mark, "so you will not feel that you have missed any very great pleasure if you do not eat."

### III

They came out of the theatre, and still some of the glamour lay about them. Shaw's *St. Joan* in shining armour still dazzled their eyes, shining even through the Epilogue. Pennons fluttered in the blue-black night, and chivalry raised its dying head, while *St. Joan* affirmed



her faith, and honest men did murder in the name of God: and other honest men were martyred because the flames of their beliefs shone too brightly. And a pitying God looked down on a world that committed follies beyond belief; and yet the follies were shot with golden gleams, because of the spirit that was in them, the piteous striving to interpret the will of God through the finite minds of men.

"I don't believe in too much education," said Davida suddenly.

They still stood in the warm September night, on the steps of the theatre.

"What you mean is," said Mark prosaically, "that you don't believe in half-educating them. Either leave them their simple faith, or give them something better."

"I'm not sure," she said dreamily, "that you can give them anything better; at least, you won't give them anything that makes them happier."

He took her arm and hurried her down the steps.

"My dear child," he said firmly, "you can't get converted on the steps of Salisbury theatre . . . it would be merely ludicrous."

"On the contrary," she said, though she laughed, "I could get converted anywhere."

And as they walked back to the hotel, something of vision still shone in her eyes, and her lips were parted. Her dark hair was blown back from her forehead, and she looked at Mark as a dark St. Joan would look when the voices chimed in her head.



It gave him an uncomfortable feeling, as if with his talk of cold facts he were spoiling some gleam of beauty. This farrago of sacrifice, and the world well lost for an ideal. How many useful lives had it spoilt? His face hardened and his lips formed a thin line.

"Did it help the world," he said dryly, "that a peasant girl was burnt in the name of God?"

"The spirit of the peasant girl helped the world, I think," she said soberly.

"She was burnt in the name of God . . . but for political reasons," he said, "and although to-day we should not burn her, we should deal as drastically as possible with her."

"But would you to-day find anyone who would face burning in these days of semi-education?"

They wrangled on until they reached the hotel.

In the lounge of the hotel they found Alice. She was sitting in a corner with Piet Barneveldt, who, when he saw them, stood up with manifest relief. He looked clumsy and nervous, and Davida imagined that on the rare occasions when he did come to town, he went to one of the smaller hotels, or else camped just outside.

Davida tingled with apprehension. Something surely disastrous must have happened for Alice to be here with Piet. He stood now, dark and uncomfortable, and handsome.

Mark greeted them both politely, and with an admirable celerity removed Piet Barneveldt to have a drink. He went uncertainly, as if hypnotized.

"What's happened?" asked Davida when they had gone.

Alice looked thinner, and her face was as white as paper.

"I just couldn't stand it," she said simply, "not another moment."

"Yes, but nothing unusual has happened?"

"Nothing unusual," said Alice bitterly, "he's simply drunk."

"How did you get away?"

"I tell you he was drunk. And Piet at least thought it was disgusting for me to be there."

"Yes, but I suppose it wasn't Piet who suggested that you should come up?"

"Not exactly," said Alice reluctantly, "but I told him I was afraid, and he thought that if I came up to my brother it would be the best thing. You see," she added primly, "he imagines that most brothers would protect their sisters from that sort of thing."

"Yes," said Davida dryly, "of course, Charles can do a lot of protecting at the moment."

"But you're here," said Alice.

"But I don't see how I can . . . in legal parlance . . . harbour you if your father turns up to-morrow and demands that you return to him," answered Davida. She was rapidly coming to the conclusion that she had been mistaken in reading anything worse than usual in Alice's letter. Alice had apparently seized the opportunity to make a gesture as usual, and hoped to impress people

with a desperation that would force them to do something. But in any case, what could be done? Charles would be the last person to attempt to back her up, and at the moment it was unfair to ask him. Davida was rather rocky on how the law stood with regard to recalcitrant daughters, even if they possessed unpleasant parents. And moreover she was still in the dark as to Charles's financial position. Her father-in-law paid the hotel bills, and she had very little ready money of her own.

Alice suddenly dropped her attitude of silent reproach.

"I suppose you can't do anything," she said hopelessly, "and I know Charles doesn't like me. But I don't know what to do. It's more awful than you think, Davida, there's something in the air. I do honestly think he's . . . not normal."

"Everyone knows that," murmured Davida.

"I can't stay there alone."

There was a desolate note in her voice that shook Davida's resolution.

"I don't know what we can do," she said.

"Piet asked me to marry him," said Alice slowly. "It would be a way out, but I can't take it."

"It would be rather hard lines on Piet to be used as a way out."

Alice shook her head and began to pull at a piece of loose wicker on the table.

"No . . . I wouldn't do it just for that. I'm really rather fond of him. I . . . I always rather liked him. I did when there was that row about my meeting him,

but . . . well, I was rather a snob . . . and it was true that I was secretly engaged to Archie. At least I thought I was, though I know now that he never meant to marry me. He only said it to keep me quiet. I am fond of Piet. I should like to marry him."

"Well, why don't you then?" asked Davida curiously.

Alice's face changed. An unaccustomed resolution came into it.

"I won't marry anyone now," she said.

"But why not?"

"I can't tell you. I can't tell anyone."

She looked at Davida sombrely.

"Aren't you glad you haven't got any children?" she said.

Davida flushed.

"Don't be impertinent," she answered.

Alice reddened and hunched herself up in her chair.

Mark came back into the room alone.

"Barneveldt has gone off to get himself a room somewhere," he told them. "He's coming round to-morrow morning to help stand the racket. He's quite aware that there will be a racket to stand."

He glanced at Davida with a queer, shy appeal, as if he begged her not to do anything rash.

"What can we do?" she asked helplessly.

"Nothing until to-morrow," he answered promptly.

"I suppose I shall have to tell Charles," said Davida.

"Yes, I think you'll have to. Something will have to be done. It can't go on, according to young Barneveldt."

"But what can be done?"

"Well, for one thing, Alice might get a job. There are lots going. Lots of people want companions out here, who will help them run their houses and children. They pay well, and give them quite a good time."

"That's an idea," said Davida pensively.

Alice stirred in her chair and became less hunched.

"I could do that," she said. "I think I should rather like children."

"You see," said Mark's glance to Davida, "there's no need for extreme measures. All you want is common sense and reason."

"Suppose she doesn't get a job?" inquired Davida.

"Well, then we might think of something else. In the meantime we had better see about getting a room and things like that."

"Did you bring any kit with you?" asked Davida.

It appeared that Alice had brought no kit. She had met Piet up the track by the drift, leaving the Old Man drinking in his own room.

"I want to talk to you after she has gone to bed," murmured Mark. "Come down again after you have settled her in."

Upstairs Alice proved unusually subdued. Instead of continuing to wail and grumble she said: "Thanks awfully. I'm afraid I'm an awful nuisance. Don't bother about anything else; I can manage."

"It's very melting, you know," said Davida to Mark when she got downstairs again. "And by the way, do you

think we are shocking the hotel staff very much, with these late sittings?"

"I gather it would take a good bit to shock the hotel staff," said Mark, "and we are very mild. But about your sister-in-law. It may be very melting, but you can't do anything."

He looked round the lounge, in which most of the lights were out.

"It's appallingly depressing," he said. "Shall I get the car and drive out to Mallin's? We can talk on the way."

But Davida thought not. She was not at all sure that there might not be some development during the night. If the Old Man found that Alice had gone he might come straight up after her.

"What exactly did Piet Barneveldt say?" she asked as they sat down.

"Well, he said that the Old Man was more than eccentric, he was pretty mad. Barneveldt stayed around doing odd jobs, chiefly on account of Alice. He seems very devoted in a strong, silent manner. The Old Man wasted a lot of good sarcasm on him, I should imagine, though it did penetrate that his remarks to Alice were not exactly complimentary. He also embroidered his hell theory, which shocked Barneveldt, who is religious, and frightened Alice. And from lunch-time onwards he got steadily drunk, and about nine o'clock he used to get his horse and ride off. Barneveldt has spent most of his nights in the romantic pursuit of watching over Alice, lying low somewhere near the house. In fact, the long and the short

of it is that Barneveldt got the idea that it is not safe for Alice to be down there alone. I'm sorry to disturb Charles, but I think he'll have to be told. Barneveldt, as you may know, is not the sort of man to fancy things, nor is he likely to exaggerate."

Davida sat silent for a minute. Her eyes were shadowed and her lips set.

"Listen," she said at last. "I don't know that it will do any good telling Charles. For one thing, he'll probably pooh-pooh it . . . and for another, he's not likely to quarrel with his father on Alice's account."

Mark looked at her quickly.

"I don't think you are altogether right. You ought to know him better than I do, but it's possible that living amongst it, you've got the wrong angle. While he was down there his father only broke out into these bouts of drinking occasionally: now he's at it all the time. While Charles was there, therefore, he was some kind of a check. That check is removed. Don't you think Charles knows quite well that he was a restraining factor in the case, and will realize better than we do exactly what's happening?"

"Do you think," said Davida suddenly, "that that is why he won't leave the farm?"

He thought for a moment. "Possibly . . ."

"Well, in that case," she said wearily, "I don't think he has any right to sacrifice Alice and myself for his father."

"He's probably not acting on reason at all, he's acting



on some emotion. But I am quite certain that whatever his feelings about Alice are, he wouldn't let it go as far as risking . . . well, danger."

"I don't know," said Davida in a queer husky voice. "I believe he'd sacrifice anyone to his father."

"But not," Mark retorted, "his father to Alice. And for his father's sake, in case the Old Man did do anything desperate, I think you'll find he'll be willing to do something about this."

They stared at each other silently.

The clock in the dim lounge ticked on. Mark stretched out both his hands and took hold of Davida's. She sat very still as he bent over them.

"Davida," he said, without looking at her, "do you love him?"

"I don't know," she said quietly. "To-night I don't know."

His head bent lower, and he kissed her hand. His lips were very dry and hot.

"Well, will you think about it, and decide whether you do or not?" he murmured.

"Yes," she answered, and suddenly it seemed as if a cold hand were laid across her heart, so that it almost stopped beating.

She looked up and over her shoulder and saw the Old Man, sjambok swinging from his wrist, grinning down at them as he grinned the night they had supper, when Charles was taken to hospital.

Mark did not see him and she could not speak. She

tried to pull her hands away and her lips formed his name, but before a sound came the Old Man stretched over and took him by the back of his coat. Her scream and the hiss of the sjambok were simultaneous. The porter ran in, but the Old Man, still gripping Mark, knocked him backwards, and he staggered and fell, hitting his head against the door. And after that it was nightmare. Mark was like a limp doll, horribly shaken by a giant, while the sjambok hissed through the air and curled round his body with a ghastly soft thud. It cut Mark's collar away; his shirt-front was crumpled and bloody. He shrieked once, and the sjambok caught him across his mouth and turned it into a bleeding slit. And the Old Man's face was a livid mask, with two flaming turquoise eyes, and with every hiss of the sjambok his breath came whistling through his nostrils.

She rushed forward once and the whip caught her round the shoulders; she crumpled up, gasping and sobbing.

And then there were footsteps outside, and laughter that stopped in a stifled gasp. Someone said "Christ!" and men ran forward.

Mark, a limp, sodden rag, was flung at her feet.

"You bloody swine," said a familiar voice.

It was Pelham. Pelham and the "Gang."

She began to sob tearlessly. Betty Thames, who had been going to shoot a leopard, flung an arm round her, an arm cool from driving through the night.

"Oh, my dear," said Betty Thames. "My dear heart. The devil!"

The Old Man stood grinning, swaying from toe to heel, from heel to toe.

"How do you like him now, daughter-in-law?" he inquired in a soft voice.

"Shut up," said David Pelham.

And Mallin, a tall, black-haired youth, moved forward.

"Shut up," he snarled, "or I'll plug you, age or no age, you unspeakable swine."

"Oh, don't argue," said a girl's voice. "Get a doctor."

"It's all right. John has gone for one."

Davida suddenly slid into a chair and hid her face.

"Look here," said Betty Thames, "come away, come upstairs."

"I can't go," whispered Davida, "until I know how he is."

"My daughter-in-law," said the Old Man, "is coming home with me."

"That," said Pelham, "is where you are quite mistaken. You may bully one or two girls, but you can't bully us, and Mrs. Bruce will do exactly what she wishes to do, and we'll see that she's allowed to do it."

The Old Man grinned at their young, set faces, but he did not move. Possibly he was aware of the curl of sick disgust on Mallin's mouth, the shocked intense enmity on Pelham's face; possibly he was sobering, for the grin gradually faded. He raised his arms stiffly above his head and let them fall abruptly before he walked away. He

had to walk through them to get to the door, and they made way silently, and saw that he was shuddering violently.

## IV

Pelham and the doctor took Mark up to the hospital. The hotel manager and his wife had been wakened and they brought towels and hot water, but the doctor wound him in a sheet, as if it had been a shroud, and he was carried with his legs dangling horribly out to the car, and taken away.

When he had gone the conversation, which had been carried on in whispers, broke into a spate of indignation.

The manager wanted to know what had happened. The porter wanted to tell all he knew. But Betty Thames, with the dark-browed Mallin behind her, interrupted.

"Mrs. Bruce isn't going to tell you anything to-night. She's coming back with me, and she's going to stay with me, and Dad's going to do all the questioning that's necessary to-morrow."

Davida put out a shaky hand. Through the mist of horror she had remembered Alice.

"I can't," she said. "Alice is upstairs. I can't leave her alone."

"She can come, too," said Betty. "I wouldn't leave either of you here alone, nor both. Someone go and wake her up."

"And what about the rest of you sliding off?" inquired

Mallin. "Pelham will be back in a few minutes, and he and I comprise a fairly efficient bodyguard, if a bodyguard is needed. Though what we really want is a Lunacy Commission and a strait-jacket."

When Alice came down only Betty and Mallin were there.

"Come on," said Mallin, "let's get out of this morgue. We'll leave a message for Douglas to come on and bring us the news."

There was a sense of security in being in a private house, an instinctive feeling that people did not easily commit outrages in other people's houses, more especially when the house happened to belong to a magistrate.

"I expect you are much too nervous to go straight to bed," said Betty. "It's so futile to tell people who are all wrought up to lie down and go to sleep. As if they could. I'll make some tea and leave you to Mallie, who is really very soothing in spite of his appearance."

"Yes, sit down and have a cigarette," said Mallin. "I suppose you are bothered to death waiting for Pelham and some news."

"Do you think he's dead?" said Davida huskily. "He was so horribly quiet."

"Good Lord, no. Don't worry about that."

Alice was standing uncertainly by the door, her eyes round with alarm and interrogation.

Mallin suddenly recollected her.

"Come and sit down too," he said.

At that moment the door opened, and Mrs. Thames

appeared in a blue dressing-gown, with her thick grey hair hanging on either side of her face in two school-girlish plaits.

"What are you young people doing?" she began good-humouredly, when Betty's voice came from the kitchen. "You come along here, Mums, and don't bother the ladies and gentlemen. They're all upset."

Davida, sitting very still and gripping the arms of her chair, hardly heard. Her ears were attuned for the sound of a car.

Mallin applied himself to giving Alice a censored version of the affair in a low voice.

"How dreadful!" said Alice in a scared voice. "Oh, how dreadful."

She glanced apprehensively over her shoulder at the window, as if she thought the Old Man might appear there silently, and be grinning at them through the curtains.

"He won't come here," said Mallin. "For one thing he doesn't know where you are, and secondly, if he did, he couldn't do anything."

The sound of tires crunching on gravel brought Davida to her feet. Mallin went to open the door. She heard the muffled murmur of conversation in the hall, and her hands clenched.

"It's all right," said Pelham, as he came into the room, "it's not as bad as it might be. He's badly knocked about, of course, but they hope he won't be badly disfigured."

Mrs. Thames came in, followed by Betty who was carrying a tray.

"My poor child," she said to Davida, "what a mercy those young people turned up when they did! Now you have some tea, and try not to think about it too much, while Betty and I fix up beds."

"I—I'm sorry to be such a nuisance," said Davida, but her lips shook so much that she could hardly form the words, and she broke down into a fit of shaken sobbing.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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### I

DAVIDA half awoke the next morning, and lay for some time in a vague, terrifying waking dream. She could not identify the terror, nor collect her thoughts; and though the vague terror was horrible, yet it was accompanied by a reluctance to really awake. Inwardly she crouched away from facing the day and the decision it would entail. But slowly, and against her will, she awoke; consciousness forced itself upon her unwilling mind, and it became an effort to keep her eyes closed.

She sat up in bed and stared at the unfamiliar room. It reminded her irresistibly of her own room before she had married. There were the stacks of invitation cards stuck in the mirror, the books, the photographs of young men in silver frames, the one dressing-table, and the delicious sense of privacy and ownership. One lost that sense of ownership when one married and shared a room, and someone else's things were in that room. It sent a fierce gush of regret through her heart, the regret that all women feel some time or other; the regret that they have given up the keen, clear freedom of spinsterhood for the interchanged existence of marriage. She felt the wild, frantic revolt against the fact that another person had

the right to demand her thoughts, to interfere in her decisions, to be considered in all her arrangements. It was intolerable, intolerable! And the revolt narrowed down to a sick sense of defeat. That any person in the world should even find it possible to think that they had any justification for violently interfering between herself and another individual was an outrage. That it was possible for another person to indulge in physical violence, that anybody should outrage the decencies of life, was retrogressive, was a reversion to the old dark ages of violence, with murder as the only means of settling matters. That such a ghastly thing should have happened to Mark! It was agonizing. To Mark! For anyone else it would have been bad enough, but with them it might have ended with the physical pain, and they might have got retribution: but for Mark, it would be an unspeakable degradation. His soul, not only his body, would be lacerated. Civilization in the grip of savagery! What could common sense and reason do before a savage with a sjambok?

Her mouth twisted into a quivering grimace of pain.

Betty knocked at the door and came in with the breakfast tray.

"I've got a message for you from Mark," she said; "he says, don't worry about him. Dad went round to the hospital to see him first thing this morning. He—er—couldn't talk much, but he managed to give that message."

She put the tray down on a table by the bed, and sat herself on the foot.

"Look here," she said, "can you talk about it? If you can I wish you would, because I think it would help. But if you can't, don't."

She gazed at Davida out of wide, child-like eyes, and rumbled her short curly hair with a small brown hand.

"He . . . that old brute . . . has been round to the hospital to see your husband," she said abruptly.

"I hadn't thought of that," said Davida slowly.

She was thinking, not of the Old Man's visit, but of Charles. Of course, there was Charles to be considered.

"Dad says," continued Betty, "that you must stay with us whatever happens, until you have arranged everything properly . . . and Alice too. By the way, a darkling Dutchman appeared here in a state of frenzy this morning, wanting to know what had happened to her. We assured him that she was quite safe and in bed, and asked him to call again later. A very fruity young man . . ." she added with an uncontrollable chuckle.

"Yes, that was Piet Barneveldt," said Davida. "But about staying with your people . . . it's most awfully good of you, but I really can't impose. . . ."

"Rats! Look here, do you mind if I am altogether frank and open, etc.? There may be an awful shindy. You see, we don't really know what it was all about, or whether the Old Man is safe to be let loose, or what your husband thinks. And in any case you'll have all sorts of things to decide, and it's much better you should be

with us . . . official posish and all that bunk . . . stops scandal, etc., etc. What I mean to say is, nobody will think you were indulging in a long-drawn-out embrace *à la* movies when he arrived, if mother says you weren't."

"I wasn't," said Davida with a faint smile.

"I didn't think you were," said Betty pensively. "I mean, apart from the fact that you don't look as if you did much of that, I was quite sure you wouldn't be doing it with that nosey porter snooping about.

"Have some breakfast," she added. "It will buck you up."

Davida sat up.

"You know, it's most terribly good of you all."

"Oh, pish and tush! Surely we are allowed to stick by our friends! And besides, that old brute ought to be hanged. I can't tell you how bad I feel about poor little Lill."

She got up, and poured out some coffee.

"I think I'd better go straight down to the hospital," said Davida.

But she felt her nerves quiver as she spoke. What had the Old Man said to Charles? And what sort of an attitude was he likely to adopt? For herself, she was not sure what attitude she wanted him to adopt. Did she really care very much? All she felt clearly at the moment was a piercing sympathy for Mark and a bitter anger about her father-in-law. And Charles was mixed up with her anger. He had the makings of just such another savage. She felt nothing about Charles except that he made

things more difficult because he had a right to some explanation, because he thought he had claims upon her.

"Yes, I'd better go down to the hospital," she said again.

"D'you want to go alone, or would you like Dad to come with you?"

Davida's eyes darkened.

"I can go alone," she said quickly.

"Well, the only thing is," said Betty, "that we don't know where the old beast is. He may be lurking about with a gun or something."

"I'm not nervous, really."

"Well, talk to Dad about it. Oh, by the way, we sent round to the hotel this morning and got your kit, so you will have something to rise and don."

She went off in a few minutes, leaving Davida to dress, but in a few minutes Alice appeared.

"Davida," she said anxiously, "are you going to see Charles?"

Davida nodded.

"Then . . . I just wanted to say . . . don't bother about me. Mrs. Thames thinks I shall be able to get a job, and so . . . I mean . . . I don't want you to be more bothered than you already are."

"That's rather nice of you, Alice," said Davida absently.

"Can I do anything to help you?" asked Alice earnestly. She was obviously longing to sympathize.

"Thanks, but there's really nothing. I'm going straight down to the hospital."

Alice, she supposed, couldn't help fluttering, but she meant well.

"Oh, Davida," exclaimed Alice, "I'm so sorry about everything."

"Yes, it is unfortunate," said Davida.

If only Alice didn't give her that feeling of embarrassed impatience! If only she could be like that child, Betty Thames, for instance, who could mention facts without stumbling over them, and making them appear matters of discomfort! Why couldn't Alice say: "I'm sorry about Mark Lill and you," instead of that ambiguous "everything," as if the "everything" embraced matters that were unmentionable.

"I suppose," continued Alice diffidently, "that Charles has been told . . . everything?"

"Oh, my God!" cried Davida, and she felt she could almost have screamed it. "How do I know? I haven't seen him."

Alice, with a hurt expression, backed out of the room, and Davida pulled on her hat in a frenzy of raw nerves.

## II

Mr. Thames was worthy of his wife and daughter; a thin, short, white-haired man with friendly, shrewd eyes, and a habit of smoothing his white moustache. He was

possessed of a quiet authority that made it simple and natural to agree with his suggestions. It was, found Davida, a great relief to drive with him to the hospital instead of going alone.

"You'll want to talk to your husband," he said, when they got there. "And I'll wait for you downstairs. Don't feel that you have got to hurry . . . there's no need. I've got nothing at all to do this morning."

She was edgily conscious that the nurse looked at her with curiosity as she walked down the corridor, and it sapped her confidence at every step. Her imagination raced ahead. She pictured Charles white and furious, and then broken, on the verge of a relapse. Or cold and unpleasant.

But when she got into the room he was lying propped up by pillows, eating an apple and reading a book.

He put his book down with a meticulous care that betrayed him. And his eyes had their old blank look.

"Hullo!" he said levelly.

"Has your father told you," she said steadily, "of his latest outrage?"

"He told me quite a lot of things," said Charles. "Why don't you sit down?"

She sat down.

"Do you consider," she asked, "that because a man kissed my hand it is an excuse for nearly killing him with a sjambok?"

Her voice shook.

"I should have quite killed him," said Charles.



He looked at her with a faint fixed smile, horribly reminiscent of her father-in-law's grin.

She stood up.

"Oh," she cried, "you're unspeakable . . . you and your father . . . one idea-ed savages! Do you suppose for one moment that I would carry on a love affair and still live with you?"

"You were not beaten, were you?" he inquired.

She stared at him in amazement.

"You were not blamed," he added, making a contemptuous movement with his hand.

"I think you must be mad," she said.

He shook his head.

"No, I'm not mad. I'm merely a convert to my father's theory that women are not safe unless they are kept in a harem. They will fall to any fool who flatters or sympathizes. I thought you were different. Evidently I was wrong. That silver-tongued rogue found you easy game."

And as she stared at him with glowing flags of crimson on each cheek, he went on: "Weren't things bad enough without this? Weren't we cursed with Alice, and all that she stood for, without you doing this?"

"I do not know what you are talking about," she countered coldly. "Things were certainly bad enough for me. Did you ever think what it was like there with your father . . . an evil-minded lunatic . . . with your wretched sister . . . and with you solely concerned in inheriting your father's money and lands at all costs? Did you ever think of that? And what does Alice stand

for except your father's foul mind towards women, his bullying contempt for women?"

"There was one thing I had," he said, "to contradict his beliefs about women . . . and that was you."

"And you thought his beliefs worth contradicting at the cost of my happiness?"

"I thought," he said slowly, "that you understood."

"I tried to understand," she said bitterly, "but I never could."

"Then why . . ." he asked oddly, "did you stay? I was sure you understood."

"I do not understand even now."

"But, good God," he ejaculated, "couldn't you see that there was something more than the damned farm that kept me there? Do you think anyone in their sane senses would have stayed there unless there had been some excuse . . . some reason for anyone being as he was? If I sacrificed you I sacrificed myself as well. . . ."

"You gave singularly little indication that you felt that way."

"Oh, my God, must everything be put down in black and white? I thought women were supposed to have some sort of intuition. There are some things that can't be said. Did you expect me to go about whining about sacrifices?"

"Then," she said gravely, "I think you expected almost more of me than was possible. You demanded a kind of sublime faith, like that demanded by God. And what faith did you have in me? Because Mark Lill kissed my hand. . . ."

"I've told you I don't blame you."

"Even," she said furiously, "if he had been my lover, it would not have justified such savagery."

"There we differ. We agree that he was not your lover, he only hoped to be. He got what he deserved. It's finished." And sudden light came into his eyes. "Unless," he added, "you imagine that you are in love with him."

"Whether I love him or not has nothing to do with it now. Shall I tell you why I stayed on? Because I loved you. I couldn't understand, but I loved you. But now . . . I don't think I love you any more. I am almost sure I don't. I couldn't ever have loved you, I think, if you are really as you seem now. . . ."

"No," he interrupted, "you couldn't have loved me if you had to sit up till three o'clock in a half-lit hotel lounge for Lill to kiss your hands. I suppose you will say that it was merely politeness . . . a pretty attention?"

"Well," she said, "possibly, as you say, I had already stopped loving you. I don't know. Nor do I pretend that it was merely a politeness. But first, do you know why we were sitting up? It was because of Alice . . . no, don't sneer . . . who had been brought up to Salisbury by Piet Barneveldt, because *he* did not consider it was safe for her to be left there alone with your father. No! You can listen to it all. When you were there he only made a drunken beast of himself occasionally, however unpleasant he may have been when he was sober. But when you were away, he made a beast of himself every day and all day. . . ."

"I suppose it didn't occur to you that that was why I stayed?"

"It did occur to me last night . . . but let that pass. At any rate, he was so beastly that Piet Barneveldt brought Alice away. He is neither hysterical nor imaginative. I am quite sure he will be prepared to tell you himself what your father was like. It was because I didn't know what to do that I stayed up talking to Mark. I did *not* know what to do . . . whether to appeal to you, whether to discount the story . . ."

"And so to comfort you he kissed your hands?"

"If you like to put it that way."

"And offered you a substitute for your present husband, who seemed more than likely to be a useless cripple?"

She swayed and recovered.

"Oh, Charles, how could you?" she whispered, and suddenly her knees failed her and she dropped by the side of his bed, her head on her arms outspread over the counterpane.

"My dear," said Charles in a thin weary voice, "how could *you*?"

He put out his hand and took hers, and instinctively her fingers tightened about his.

"Oh, God! What a ghastly muddle," he said drearily.

"Davida," he said after a little, "didn't you know that I was jealous? I've always been bloodily jealous. I don't think you're jealous, so you can't know what it feels like. It is a loathsome feeling; it drives away reason and decent

feeling when it catches you by the throat. Will you therefore forgive the things I've said, and understand that I was beyond reason when I said them . . . and we'll discuss the rest later? There's a devil of a lot to discuss, but I feel too flopped out to talk about them now."

Her face was still hidden, and she cried a little.

"I'll forgive what you said," she answered at last, "and I'll understand. But oh, Charles, I spoke the truth! I don't know whether I love you. I don't know anything. . . ."

"Do you love him?" he asked.

"I don't know. . . ."

He released her hand and sighed.

"I can't talk about it any more just now."

He was lying back with his eyes closed, biting the sheet, and after a moment or two she went away.

### III

She saw Mark before she left the hospital. He was swathed in bandages, but mercifully his eyes were clear. They were like two transparent grey stones between the bandages, and tears flooded over them.

"My dear, my dear," she said, and bent and kissed the bandages over his forehead.

His eyes flickered. He became blurred before her eyes. She was afraid that she was going to cry, so with a little gesture of farewell she hurried away.

## I V

"For all your sakes," said Mr. Thames as they drove back, "I think there had better be no question of a prosecution. When I saw Lill this morning he indicated that he didn't want anything done, and it would only intensify the scandal if Bruce decided to make a defence. Better let it rest . . . the damn' scoundrel."

"How did . . . Mark . . . give you that message this morning?" she asked.

Mr. Thames looked ahead.

"He wrote it."

She nodded.

"Do you think," she asked painfully, "that his mouth will be . . . will be . . . will be horribly disfigured?"

"Well, I'm afraid it will be rather bad, but scars fade."

The hot September sunshine was dazzling on the white road. The bungalows were dusty and their gardens parched, waiting thirstily for the rains. The avenues of newly planted trees rustled faintly in a mild breeze. Everything was bare and desolate under the staring blue sky. An odious ramshackle little town, a mocking imitation of civilization.

"I think I shall go back to England," said Davida wearily.

"There's no hurry," said Mr. Thames. "Think things out. Think very carefully, and while you are thinking, in between whiles, try and let us amuse you."

"You know," said Davida earnestly, "you're most awfully good to me, and why should you be?"

Mr. Thames laughed.

"You're in a Colony," he said. "Colonials have a lot of faults, but they stick together and they help each other."



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

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### I

PIET BARNEVELDT and Alice were alone on the 'Thames' veranda when Davida came out after taking off her hat. He was just going away, stolidly, but a shade forlornly. He smiled at Davida with a friendly glint of white strong teeth.

"I am going back, Mrs. Bruce. I should like to stay in Salisbury for a little, but my father needs me."

His eyes rested stolidly on Alice, who said nothing but looked away over the flower-filled garden.

Davida remembered Eileen Sylvester. Oh, well, it seemed that she wouldn't get him, and she would have been so much more suitable than Alice. Though if Alice stuck to her intention of not marrying him it would be unfortunate for everybody, though Eileen might get him on the rebound. And that reminded her of Charles. Perhaps Eileen was in love with Charles. It would need a general sorting out for everything to be put straight.

There was only one thing to do in the meantime, keep one's mental balance . . . not be swamped by emotion . . . that steam-roller.

"I'm afraid I never came to have coffee," she said.

"It doesn't really matter," he answered. "I never expected you would."

They stood for a moment in the silence that precedes departure, when the going guest is slightly shy, and anxious not to go too abruptly, nor yet stay too long, and hopes that the initiative will be taken from him.

Davida took it.

"Well, I expect you will be in Salisbury soon."

"I shall try," he said, and hastily shook hands.

"Good-bye, Miss Bruce, good-bye, Mrs. Bruce."

"Good-bye," said Alice.

She turned quite naturally and walked down the drive with him to the gate, where his mule cart waited in charge of a sleepy boy.

"How's your husband?" called a clear cheerful voice.

Davida turned. Betty was leaning against the open French windows of the drawing-room, with a lemon-squash in her hand.

"It looks innocent enough," she announced with simple pride, "but it's got gin in it. Don't tell Dad."

"Oh, Charles is fairly all right," said Davida.

"Seeing that old brute was enough to give him a relapse," said Betty. "Come in and have a pseudo-lemon squash."

Alice was still standing out in the bright sunshine talking to Piet. He was leaning against the cart, and the thin air gave them a clear painted look, like a brilliant water-colour. Piet lounging against the cart and Alice standing motionless. It seemed as if they would

never move, as if that particular moment would last for ever, as if Time had ceased. Davida felt it so strongly that she found it difficult to move herself.

"Come on," said Betty, and the moment broke like the surface of a placid pool into which a stone has been thrown.

Piet stood straight, climbed into his cart, and shouted to his mules. They started forward, and the sleepy native, galvanized into action, clambered on to the back of the creaking cart. Alice waved, turned, and came back up the drive.

Davida went into the drawing-room.

## II

Davida was never quite sure if Betty's habit of mentioning the most strained matters as if there were nothing strained about them were intentional or unconscious. She had no reticence. She did not probe for information, nor proffer a sympathetic ear in the hope of getting confidences, but she asked outright for the main facts in the same way as she might inquire whether you had seen some casual acquaintance at the golf club. She did not, however, ask you for details. Davida found it made things easier. She had been used so long to an atmosphere of repression, in which things were not mentioned, but uncomfortably ignored even when they were glaringly apparent, that she wondered whether she had ever been

used to candour, or whether Betty was really exceptional. With Betty, if you were having a row with your husband, you were having a row. She didn't wish to know which of you was right, but she didn't pretend that you were on the best of terms with him. Her attitude seemed to be, well, let us know where we stand, and if you're fighting, fight it out; don't let me worry you, and don't bother to be polite when you don't feel like it, when you really feel like throwing plates. So she did not pretend that Davida had just paid a wifely visit to a sick husband, but she did not fish for details.

"Isn't mother marvellous?" she asked as she mixed gin, lemon and soda in the rather shabby, cretonne-y drawing-room. "She's practically fixed Alice up with a job. With Mrs. Dickson. I don't suppose you know them. They live miles away from your part of the country, but they're rather nice, and Mrs. Dickson is cheerful but sensible, so she's rather a good person for Alice, I think. So that will be one good deed for the day, and you'll be able to straighten out your own affairs without having anyone else to bother about."

In all that Betty said, in all that her father and mother said, it was plain they took it for granted that Davida would stay with them, arrange her affairs as she pleased, without interference or advice from them, but that they were willing and anxious to amuse her in the intervals.

They were absolute strangers with the exception of Betty, of whom hitherto Davida had only been aware as a member of the "Gang." But they gave her the im-

pression of confidence, and it was infinitely easier to be with them than it would have been with her own relations. Her relations would have wanted chapter and verse of her interview with Charles. Then they would have boiled with indignation, and suggested their own remedies, demanding immediate and decisive action. Mr. Thames's thoughtful: "Think very carefully . . . don't do anything in a hurry," was like balm. It was genuine. There was no fear that he would evince symptoms of impatience in a day or two. For Davida did not contemplate taking more than two or three days in which to settle matters finally.

When Alice came in Betty offered her a John Collins, but Alice, with a violent flush, refused it.

"But I'd love a lemon squash," she said.

"Positively no vices," said Betty. "I suppose your charming parent collared the lot and left nothing for his family."

It moved Davida to silent mirth. Alice struggling to cope with such frankness was distinctly funny.

### III

The Thameses lived comfortably and simply. They were not obsessed with the desire to live beyond their income that cursed one or two other people in Salisbury. They did not attempt to emulate the wealthy trades on a magistrate's salary. They had good servants, good food,

and a car, and they did the amount of entertaining that was expected of them. Davida guessed that Mrs. Thames planned and schemed so that Betty could run round with the girls of her set without feeling out of it in the way of clothes and pocket money. But it also leapt to the eye that Betty, for all her light-hearted manner, kept well within bounds, and did not attempt to appear richer than she was, which some of her friends did—friends who cried to high heaven that they couldn't live on a farm, and ruthlessly pursued any young Civil Servant, and secretly cherished hopes that one day some wealthy Englishman, big-game hunting, would come their way and carry them off to England and London, a place, they felt, they could adorn much better. They felt that they were wasted in Rhodesia, though they quite admired Johannesburg. Betty had been to England, and remained calm.

She intended ultimately to marry Mallin, though he did not know it.

Mrs. Thames appeared to feel some sort of responsibility for Alice. Davida could not have said why she knew it, for Mrs. Thames in no way openly admitted it, but something in the way she spoke to and about Alice gave that impression. She was very anxious that the girl should go to the Dicksons. "The farther she is away from the old associations, the better," she said to Davida.

"I think so, too," said Davida, marvelling that there should be found anyone willing to take Alice into their house, and to pay her for being there. "But can her father object or anything? I suppose he has some legal standing?"



Mrs. Thames shook her head. "I don't think he will raise any objections," she said, "but if he does he can raise them to my husband."

And the Dicksons (Davida harboured a secret conviction that Mrs. Thames must have brow-beaten them in some way) engaged Alice as companion-nurse. They were going back to their farm on the following day, and Alice was to go with them. She did not suggest seeing Charles before she left, though she sent him her love (which Davida refrained from giving him) and said she hoped he would soon be better.

She was a little disappointed that the Thameses did not do anything after dinner, but sat quietly talking until they went to bed; so she sat in Davida's room for half an hour, and made various hints that she would very much like to know what was happening between Davida and Charles . . . but Davida turned a deaf ear, and Alice ended up with the pious hope that "everything would be all right." But for all that, she seemed less floppy, more clear-cut and less self-absorbed. She irritated Davida by kissing her good night, but her mind was obviously on the Dicksons, and the triumphs that were to be hers in an environment where she would be appreciated.

She went off radiantly the next morning, with some new cotton frocks that Davida had lent her the money to buy, and a new hat. Nobody had any suggestions to offer as to how the rest of her clothes were to be salvaged from the farm.



## IV

Immediately she had gone Davida set out for the hospital. She felt that the present undefined situation could not be allowed to continue, but she was far from knowing what she really wanted to do. Mark weighed upon her mind. She missed him appallingly, so much that she wondered if she had any right to hesitate. And in any case, how could she ever make up to him for the frightful thing that had happened? She smiled rather sadly as she walked along. That was a point of view he himself would deprecate. He would insist that she could not be responsible for anything that happened to him, that it was a foolish and emotional form of argument. But after all, it was because he loved her (presumably he loved her) . . . that he was lying in hospital possibly disfigured for life . . . and if life were run on logic and reason it would be a dreary affair, with few heroisms and no sacrifices, and nothing to lighten its grey gloom. She would not, she told herself, think of doing anything so foolish as to marry him, to compensate him if he wanted her, if she herself did not love him. But she did. . . . She was happy when he was there, she missed him when he was not, and she had hundreds of things in common with him.

She flinched away from the thoughts of Charles. He was part and parcel of the emotional side of life. He, according to his own words, acted on emotional grounds.

He would have quite killed Mark, without waiting to find out anything. He would, because somebody he loved wanted it, do things of which he himself did not approve. He would, because his father would go to the devil without him, ruin his own life and hers, rather than let him go. And surely it was utterly unreasonable?

Her feeling for him . . . what was it but a queer emotional thing that bound her with ropes of unreason? Something in her ached because he was unhappy, and hurt at the thought of parting from him; but how could she stay and keep her self-respect? He would expect her to go back to the farm, to leave Mark out of all consideration, to meet his father again, and be content in return with a few breathless moments on the darkened veldt, when the moon was a pale disc in the sky, and the wind rustled through the gum trees, and Beauty for an instant unveiled her face: to be a stranger to him for days, and, for a few moments, a lover.

And yet . . . and yet, she had been happy in the solitude. She had loved the hot smell of the earth and the wide stretch of the veldt; carelessly, mindlessly happy in the dappled bush, where the sunlight fell in showers of hot spears. Happiness had caught her by the throat when she had leaned out of her window into the cool clear night and seen the black sharp shadows of the gum trees under the moon, and smelt the scent of mimosa drifting up from the *vlei*. And Charles had stirred in his sleep and muttered her name. But it was a long time since he had done that.

If Mark were so scarred that people did not like to look at him, what could she do but be prepared to look at him always?

But deep down in her soul was a small, dark fear that more than the calm affection of reason was needed to face that . . . a disquieting doubt.

Dr. Featherstone was coming out of the hospital as she arrived.

"Just the person I wanted to see," he exclaimed. "I was coming along to look you up."

"Has anything happened?" she asked swiftly.

"No . . . no . . . no. It's what's going to happen I want you to see about. Trevon thinks that your husband's leg ought to be broken and re-set. There's just a chance that everything might go right. I'm afraid it's the only chance. As things are, he'd be badly crippled. It's only fair to tell you, Mrs. Bruce."

"What exactly do you mean by crippled?"

"Well, it's the hip. I'm badly worried about the hip. We could get an opinion from the Cape if you cared. What I am afraid of is that it will always drag; but if his leg is put straight it would do no more than drag; he wouldn't be helpless, he might be able to ride."

"I see," she said. "Have you said anything to him about it?"

"Yes, I thought it best to tell him, so that you can talk it over. Though really there is no question, it will have to be done."

He hustled away into his car, and Davida walked slowly into Charles's room.

"Hullo," she said.

"Hullo. They do pile Pelion on Osso, don't they? I suppose you met Featherstone?"

"Yes, I'm terribly sorry about it."

He laughed oddly.

"Well, we'll see about things. I suppose you know that the Old Man has gone back to the farm?"

"Has he?" she said indifferently.

"He has, sweet thing. I've pointed out the error of his ways to him, and he's gone away to think it over."

"Charles!" she exclaimed. "Don't talk about it like that."

"Would it help things if I were to burst into tears? He was drunk, you know. . . ." There was an appeal in his voice which she ignored.

She looked round the room.

"They say that Mark Lill may be disfigured for life," she said pointedly.

He did not seem to hear.

She repeated herself, but still he did not answer.

"I hardly think that the fact that he was drunk affects the matter," she added.

He looked up wearily.

"Nothing really affects the matter now," he said, "except what you and I are going to do. It's a little difficult. I know I haven't a leg to stand on," he gave a short laugh. "Literally and metaphorically. I know you couldn't go

down to the farm again . . . he's made it impossible. It appears more than probable that I shall be completely out of action. I certainly couldn't take on a job that entailed farming. I haven't any qualifications for office work . . . I shan't have a penny beyond my present bank balance when I break it to him that we don't intend to return . . . I might, conceivably, make some money by writing . . . journalism or something . . . but it's a precarious sort of career. . . ."

If only he had not looked so ill, she told herself afterwards, if only his eyes had not been so blue and hollow, and if his hands had kept still and not strayed nervously up and down the edge of the sheet, she would have told him at once how impossible it was . . . would have told him quickly and sensibly that they had better get divorced as quickly as possible. . . .

But as it was, she could only murmur helplessly . . . "It's impossible. . . ."

"It seems so," he said.

She fumbled for words to explain that it was not on account of the financial question . . . but that she did not really love him.

"I think I ought to go to England," she said.

There was a long silence.

"Well, that settles it then," said Charles.

She felt wretchedly that she was in another false position. It looked as if now that he had no money and was lame, but was at last, and for her sake, willing to leave the Old Man, she was letting him down . . . running

away when things were really difficult. It looked as if she was really in love with Mark . . . as if she had been making love that night . . . Charles thought that . . . he was bound to think it . . . She remembered Oliver and Lydia. Lydia had gone away when to stay would have meant ruin for them both, and hadn't cared what people said. But then Lydia had known that Oliver would understand . . . Charles probably wouldn't understand, and it would be no use explaining. If he thought that she was going because he would be penniless if she stayed, nothing would induce him to let her . . . and if she insisted, he would probably do something unspeakably foolish like refusing to go back to the farm anyway. Oh, what a filthy muddle . . . And there was Mark. . . .

"If you want a divorce," said Charles quietly, "I'll give it you . . . but for God's sake don't come back and live in this country . . . it's not big enough for the two of us."

"I don't," she said desperately, "but if I was in England . . . it would give you a chance to see how things were going. You could go back to the farm . . . and write . . . It would be fairer for everyone."

"No," he said almost cheerfully. "I'm not going to sit and wait for the Old Man to die . . . we'll either stick it out together, and let him know we mean to . . . or else . . . you want Mark . . . and I'll go back to the Old Man."

"But it's not that I want Mark," she said quickly.

"Well, then, you'd better stick to me. Or don't you



want either of us? If you go to England, I shall go back to the farm, because there's no reason not to . . . it wouldn't help you . . . and it would certainly finish him. And it wouldn't make any odds to me what I did."

He was almost as precise as Mark when he said it; an unnatural precision that hurt her.

"As I say," he added, "if you stay I may be a pretty useless wreck, but old Thames might raise me a job that would keep the wolf from the door. The prospect is not, I admit, enlivening."

If only, thought Davida, he wouldn't be so scrupulously fair. If only he wouldn't keep talking on such a very reasonable basis . . . She stopped herself. After all, what she had asked for was reason . . . now when she got it, she didn't like it.

She thought of Lydia again . . . and Mark.

"I must think," she said. "I can't think just now."

He picked up a book.

"Do you mind going away and thinking?" he asked, "and not coming back until you have thought? In point of fact if you think you'll go to England, I'd just as soon you didn't come back . . . just send me a note, and I'll let my lawyer do all the rest. . . ."

V.

She inquired after Mark and was told he was asleep. She left a message, and with a feeling of shamed relief hurried away.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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### I

SHE took a rickshaw back to the Thames' bungalow, and as the "boy" padded along in a poor imitation of the Zulu rickshaw "boy's" powerful lope, she leant back and tried to come to some sort of decision. How *could* she decide anything until she knew how Mark was? And yet she wanted to leave him out of it, wanted not to be influenced by any sentimental feeling of obligation towards him. She was sure he would resent any such feeling, but it would creep in and colour her thoughts. And she missed Mark so terribly. She missed his quiet, reassuring attitude, the way he had of making life seem simple. Mark always held that there was always one plainly right course to take in any matter if you only looked at things logically. But how in the name of Heaven could you entirely ignore the point of view of other people? The clear line of reason seemed to lead towards an intense selfishness, or rather to doing what one felt inclined to do. (Mark generally argued that what you felt inclined to do was the right thing to do, and when he talked about it, it always seemed the proper point of view.) And until she thought about it, she had never realized what strength of mind it takes to do the thing one is inclined

to do, when other people do not want one to do it. Life really was a perpetual compromise unless you were one of those strong, single-minded people who just went ahead and let the rest of the world look after itself. But you'd got to be born that way, or else you couldn't do it. You had to be physically incapable of seeing anyone else's point of view. One might admire such people . . . but did one like them? It was eminently reasonable, for instance, in an emergency . . . if there were, say, four men lost in the desert, and one of them fell ill, for the other three to save themselves and leave that man behind. Probably it would need intense moral courage to do it, and a living dog is, presumably, better than a dead lion. Still, in an emotional and sentimental world, those three men would not be exactly applauded. "Yes," people would say, "of course, he suggested it himself . . . and of course it was quite right and sensible, I suppose, three lives against one . . . yes . . ." But a cold wind would blow around those three men, a cold, uncordial wind. Could they think, those three men, that their lives had been worth that denial of honour and chivalry . . . would they be worth living with the memory of that dead man for ever with them? There seemed to be a certain prejudice for the principle, "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. . . ."

She sat very still and tried to imagine a world where there was no love. Where there was nothing except the mating instinct; in which people complied with certain

rules and customs, wisely made for their safety and convenience, but in which there were no loyalties, no foolish sacrifices, no moral obligations, in which people simply did what they thought best and logical and reasonable. A world of Robots swayed by no pity, no anguished comprehension of other people's unhappiness. A world in which, if anyone proved difficult to live with, one simply did not live with them, saying with sweet reason as one walked away: "I am sorry if it causes you pain, but your remedy is simple: you should be easy to live with." And being in no way upset by the ensuing havoc.

"But," she thought honestly, "what do I want to do? I'm arguing in circles, trying to justify myself whatever I do. Do I want to go with Mark, and am I simply trying to argue Charles out of the way . . . or do I really want to stay with Charles and persuade myself that it is really not in the least my fault that Mark is so horribly smashed up?"

She was interrupted by the sudden stopping of the rickshaw, and looked up to see the Old Man standing by its side. For a moment the only sound was the heavy panting of the rickshaw boy, and then the Old Man, with a smile excruciating in its attempt to be natural, said: "I must talk to you about several things."

Davida glanced up and down the road. In the distance was a white man walking away from them . . . two natives were dawdling by on the other side of the road . . . but otherwise the road stretched away emptily, dusty and glaring between infrequent bungalows, its recently

planted flamboyant trees listless and regular under the cloudless blue sky.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but I have nothing to say to you about anything."

He drew in his breath with a hissing sound and made an obvious effort to control himself.

"Nevertheless," he answered, "it is necessary that I speak to you."

She longed desperately for the reassuring sight of a policeman.

"I see no necessity," she said, and signalled to the "boy" to go on.

He picked up the rickshaw shafts.

"No!" said the Old Man to him and he promptly put them down again.

She was seized with a sense of helplessness. She knew he did not mind a scene, that he could outdo her in argument, since he would be quite unscrupulous in what he said, he might be abusive and she could not stand and shout abuse back at him, nor could she bear to do the only thing left, and scream in the hope that someone would come out of the nearest bungalow.

She compromised.

"You had better come to the Thames' house," she suggested.

He appeared to consider that, his eyes blue and bleak and fanatic, and again he hissed. He seemed to Davida infinitely more dangerous than he had ever been, for he was quite sober.

"I shall come straight there," he said, and stood back from the rickshaw. "Go on!" he told the "boy."

Charles had undoubtedly believed he was speaking the truth when he said that the Old Man had gone back to the farm. One thing about Charles—he never lied and he never laid traps. Then what in the name of Heaven was the Old Man doing prowling about the roads on foot, lying in wait for her? For usually Charles and his father understood one another, and if the Old Man had agreed to go back to the farm and had told Charles so, it was almost certain that he had changed his mind after leaving Charles.

She hoped devoutly that there would be large quantities of Thameses about the bungalow.

She paid the rickshaw "boy" hurriedly, overtipping him, and hurried into the bungalow. She felt that the Old Man, following her, was like the approaching doom.

There was nobody in. She felt frightened, as if the Old Man could take her away against her will, could spirit her away somewhere and keep her hidden. The same irrational sort of panic that had sometimes attacked her on the farm. Still, if he attempted anything she would not hesitate to scream the place down and there were people in the next bungalow. There was also Mr. Thames's old groom, a tall stately native, a Matabele, very reliable and loyal and not easily frightened like the Mashona. He would probably come to her assistance.

She took off her hat and went into the drawing-room. When, a short time afterwards, he was shown in by the

houseboy, she saw with relief that he looked fairly normal and that his manner was quiet.

He looked at her curiously, as if he were, for the first time, taking in her appearance. Then he sat down and lit a cigar.

"I cannot imagine," she said, "what you want to talk to me about."

He waved away a cloud of smoke that hung like a curtain between them.

"Firstly," he said amiably, "I should be greatly obliged if you would tell me where my daughter is."

"I suggest you ask Mr. Thames," she answered.

He gave a short laugh. "I cannot see why I should apply to Thames for news of my daughter, but let it pass. I shall not receive her in my house again . . . she left it with her lover, he can be responsible for her."

"In that case," responded Davida, "I can't see why you should want to know where she is, though you know quite well why she left the farm and that the construction you are putting upon her actions is quite wrong."

He put his hand to his beard and hissed again. "That is a new habit," thought Davida irrelevantly.

"I am well aware," he continued, "that you and other people have taken it upon yourselves to object to my treatment of my daughter . . . and so presumably encouraged her to rebellion. Since she chose to do it, she can now stand by it. There is, however, another matter . . ." He waved away another cloud of smoke. "I



understand from Charles that you do not intend to return to the farm?"

"I do not," she said.

She lit a cigarette and stood up nervously.

"And that in that case," continued the Old Man, "my son also intends not to return. You are possibly aware that he has no money of his own?"

"So I believe," she said.

"And that should he not return, I shall neither give him a penny, nor leave him anything in my will?"

"He told me so," she answered.

"I presume that you have also considered that he will have no means of earning his living, he will be a cripple?"

Tears stung the backs of her eyes and she could not answer.

"Have you considered how he is going to keep you and himself?"

"I have thought," she said unsteadily, "and since I don't see how he can do it, I am going back to England. . . ."

"In the same kindly way as the irregular Mrs. Templeman went back to England when she saw no prospect of Templeman keeping her any longer?"

"In very much the same way," she said.

He leant back and stroked his beard thoughtfully.

"But do not imagine," he observed, "that you will be provided with the excuse that you leave your husband for his good: you cannot have your lover and your reputation for self-sacrifice. If you go back to England I shall not have Charles back on the farm, nor shall I give him



any money. I do not approve of separations. You and Charles can come back to the farm and I will build another bungalow where I shall live. I shall not ask or expect you to see me (I understand that I am the obstacle to your return), otherwise things will be as they were before, except that we shall not have the pleasure of Alice's company. Therefore, my dear daughter-in-law, if you leave Charles and go to England it will be because you want your lover, and in order to get him, you will let everything and everybody suffer."

He stood up and jammed out his cigar in an ash-tray.

"If he had thrown you out and divorced you, I would have welcomed him back . . . but apparently you are necessary to the fool's happiness . . . he even contemplates allowing you to divorce him!"

He stopped for a moment and she saw in his eyes his bitter love—his fanatical determination to get for Charles happiness at all costs. She saw also, only too plainly, the web that was spun about her. And already, in imagination, she felt the hot, fetid breath of scandal on her cheek, felt the scampering, rat-like words fouling her life. For whatever she did now would be misconstrued. If she went back to Charles, it would be because she was afraid to do otherwise . . . if she went back to her father . . . it would be because she had been Mark's lover. But she stood very straight in front of the fireplace. Never had she looked so ardent, so elusive, as if his words that should have enmeshed her were mere futilities.

She said: "But you forget that I can live with Charles

without returning to your farm. He would still be happy."

"Would he?"

He looked at her with a strange prophetic smile.

"There is no happiness to be built out of the ruins of someone else's life," he said slowly, "no matter how right and reasonable your action may seem to you . . . or how sure you may be that they were deserving of no consideration. . . ."

He went slowly out of the room.

She heard his footsteps on the veranda and then going slowly and wearily down the drive, heavy, slow footsteps.

I I

She wished desperately for Mark. He, she knew, would sift the tangled emotions—would put his finger unerringly on the false quantity that she knew was there somewhere. Out of her chaotic life he would conjure reason. She longed for his quiet precision—his clear, impersonal view. But Mark, she remembered, could no longer be impersonal. Mark now added to the chaos. She wanted him in no close personal relationship to herself, but as a friend, an ally, a guide . . . in fact, as a touchstone of right and wrong. She had, she thought, no other touchstone—nothing—no rule—no principle. She was like a boat cut from its moorings, drifting on the wide sea.

## III

When the Thameses came back to lunch, Pelham came with them. He had been to the hospital to see Mark.

"He's bucking up," he announced, "and they think he's got quite a good chance of coming off lighter than they thought at first. And, by the way, Davida, just as I was coming away, down came your revered father-in-law, frothing like a lunatic. He bounced on to a horse and went hell-for-leather down the road. I besought the nearest nurse to rush to Charles and see that all was well, and waited trembling to hear the result. She came back and said that Mr. Bruce was quite all right . . . in fact, I should imagine he'd been giving his worthy parent what for!"

"Good for him," said Betty.

"Oh, and by the way," added Pelham, "you know Lill never finished the negotiations for Oliver's place . . . he was boggling over one or two minor details . . . well, now he's not going to buy it after all. I rather think he's going straight back to England as soon as he's better."

"Poor man," said Mrs. Thames, "I can quite imagine he's had enough of this country."

Davida said nothing. She went abruptly out of the room. She simply could not bear to discuss it.

She went and sat on her bed. She felt numb. She didn't want to see Charles, or Mark, or anybody. She wanted to be alone, to live alone and not be buffeted about among

all these conflicting emotions and desires. Supposing Mark wanted her to go away with him? She thought of his dark, precise face and shivered. She thought of his careful manner, his fussiness, the way he put his hat on and straightened his tie. But why think of all that when she liked him so much, when they were such good friends, understood each other so well? And he was kind and gentle. . . . How could she ever again face life with the Old Man in his private hell. . . .

"If I leave Charles," she said to herself, "it will be for Mark . . . so that at least someone is happy. . . ."

She sat for a long time and, by and by, her head drooped and she fell asleep huddled up on her bed.

## I V

Charles lay patiently while a tall, thin man, excitedly ushered in by Doctor Featherstone, did something very painful to his hip. He clenched his fists and thought of Davida. He thought of her so hard that he could almost see her in front of him. He supposed she'd go away with that fellow Lill. . . . She'd go out of pity . . . out of pity. Well, he didn't want her to stay with *him* out of pity! But he knew, and the knowledge forced tears into his eyes, that he did want her, he wanted her to stay with *him*, no matter for what reason. But he'd be damned if he'd tell her so. . . . No, really he didn't want her to stay with him out of pity . . . he'd see it in her eyes, in

her manner every moment of the day and it would drive him mad. No, he'd stay by himself, he'd go back to the farm and drink level with the Old Man. Memory unrolled itself like a film before his eyes. . . .

The tall, thin man gave a particularly painful prod, something clicked, and he stood up.

"That's all right," he said.

"Nothing to worry about now," he said.

"Just fix that leg and he'll walk as well as ever," he said.

"In fact," said Charles, breaking in rudely on his short, staccato sentences, "everything is quite too beautiful!"

Doctor Featherstone was grieved.

"I really think," he said, "that considering Mr. Rivers is on a holiday, and came specially to see what he could do for you, that you might at least be polite!"

"Quite right, I might," said Charles. "I apologize."

The tall, thin man grinned cheerfully.

"Don't bother . . . I probably gave you a bad time."

He went away with Doctor Featherstone, who kept muttering angrily: "Celebrated man . . . great osteopath . . . extraordinarily rude."

"That," said Charles to the nurse who lingered behind to tidy the room, "is the whole point about great men. They're not touchy. Give me some notepaper, will you? I want to send a note to my wife."

"I don't know," said the nurse dubiously, "that it can go to-night, it's getting late."

"Funny time for that fellow to come," said Charles.

"He came," said the nurse reprovingly, "at this time because he was just going away on a shooting trip and wasn't coming back to Salisbury at all. He's leaving to-morrow. Doctor Featherstone only heard he was here by chance."

"Well, look here, ring up Betty Thames and ask her to come and fetch a note for my wife."

The nurse looked even more dubious.

"Do what I tell you," said Charles unpleasantly, "do you think I don't know what I'm talking about?"

She gave him the notepaper in a disapproving silence and went away.

He cautiously moved his leg. It moved quite easily. He did it again . . . splendid. Although a short time ago he had told himself that he didn't care whether he could walk or not, now a flood of excitement poured over him.

He settled down to write to Davida.

v

It was night when Davida awoke. Outside her open window the garden smelt of rain. The clouds must have come up while she was asleep, and when she went to the window and looked out on the scented night, the air was full of a sharp sweetness. Betty was playing the piano and singing, in a high, sweet voice, negro spirituals.

The telephone bell rang. Betty stopped playing and Davida heard her answer it.

"What . . . yes . . . of course I will. Tell him I'll be along in about twenty minutes. Oh, splendid. . . ."

In a few minutes Davida heard the car start and purr away down the drive. What fun one had when one was young, very young, rushing around, full of enthusiasm, never bored, never wondering whether it was worth while. . . .

She leant against the open window and let the rain-chilled air blow against her hot face. The moon shone clear and white in the clear sky. "Oh, Lord! she is so bright to-night," the blackbird saith . . . But it was a star . . . not the moon . . . Not the moon . . . a star! "One faint star!" Her mind was like a jumble sale . . . full of rags and tags . . . "hitch your wagon to a star" . . . "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh." "You cannot have your cake and eat it!" "Oh, Charles . . . Charles . . . Charles. . . ."

Her mind raced ahead, stopped, hesitated and raced again. It was full of old saws, mangled quotations and muddled, groping philosophy. She wanted to stick to Charles, she didn't care two hoots for Mark . . . but because she wanted so urgently, so desperately to stay with Charles, she mistrusted her own judgment because she wanted it, she felt it could not be right . . . that she *ought* to go with Mark.

She leant out of the window. The wind blew back her hair, and in the kitchen a native broke into a wailing chant. Her mind checked . . . rushed back. . . . And



she was on the farm, leaning out of her own window . . . and a native sang dolefully. . . . Charles came behind her . . . kissed the nape of her neck . . . "Davida . . . I think things are going to be very difficult . . . but remember that I love you . . . and always will."

She remembered how in England her brother had called to her from the top of a hill: "Good-bye . . . Davie," had waved his arms and disappeared. It was like that, Charles's voice, a faint, far voice from the top of a hill. England! Softly swelling green hills, billowing elm trees, grey stone barns, warm soft smell of the earth. How she loved it! But Charles's voice came from a kopje in Africa. Hot sunshine, parching earth, golden haze, and stunted mopani trees. How she loved that, too! Love—what was there reasonable about love? Did one sit and think and calculate and jot up incomes, put down the price of meat, when one loved? Was there no love that could rise above housekeeping bills—nothing that could compensate for petty worries? Was there nothing—nothing beautiful? Nothing more than the material? Love, she thought, was above all things—love was something you could not catch and classify. Love of God and love of man was what made life something more than existence.

And she loved Charles!

She held her breath expectantly. She did not quite know why, but it seemed to her quickened senses that she was on the verge of some discovery. She held out her hands to the sky. But the moment faded, no divine discovery was made. She was left emptied of thought, tranquil.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

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### I

"IF THERE'S any answer," said Betty, handing over Charles's letter, "I'll buzz up to the hospital with it after dinner."

She settled down on Davida's bed.

"Did you ever know," she asked, "that Mother looked after Alice for the first six months of her life? Alice's life, I mean!"

"Did she?" said Davida absently.

"Yes . . . don't be polite . . . read your letter!"

Davida ripped the envelope. There was only a brief note to the effect that all was well, Charles's leg was better. He thought he'd let them do the re-breaking later. . . . And a postscript . . . "Talk things over with the Thameses. . . ."

She glanced at Betty, who was smoking peacefully.

"What were you saying about Alice?" she asked.

"Hinting gently," said Betty, "to find out if you knew the sad story of her life . . . if you don't, I should imagine that you and she are about the only people in Rhodesia who don't!"

Davida shook her head. . . . "No, I don't know any-

thing except that she considers herself a misunderstood angel."

Betty clasped her knees and rested her chin on them.

"I'll tell you coldly and calmly while you get ready for dinner," she said. "But to start off with, she isn't the Old Man's daughter!"

"What!"

Betty became serious.

"She's not. That's what's been all the trouble. Dad knew the Old Man when he was young . . . he knew Charles's mother, too. She was very pretty and amusing . . . all the men adored her. They raved about her. You can imagine how it was in the early days when you could count the white women out here on the fingers of one hand. And the Old Man when he was young was rather like Charles, only grimmer, Mother says. About the only soft spot he had was Charles and his wife. Charles was quite small, as you no doubt imagine, twenty-five years ago. But his mother was rather silly, very fluttery and young, and not a bit suited to the country, and *be*, the Old Man, had no money and was determined to make some and take her home. He left her in Salisbury while he went down into the country and built a house and got things started. He'd have done a lot better if he'd taken her with him and made her live with him in a mud hut. But she was so horrified at the idea and laid it on thick about taking Charles down there . . . and so down he went and worked like a nigger, while she flirted with all and sundry. Mother says that no one really took it

seriously. They thought she was just young and pretty and rather silly, though they all thought it was rather a dangerous game to play with a husband like that. Still, it was nobody's business. . . .

"And then one night the storm burst. He came back unexpectedly, rode in to see her. And he found some man or other in her bedroom. He took a sjambok to him and threw him out into the road—bang over the balcony he threw him, and luckily it was low and he only broke a collarbone or something. Then the Old Man brought her along to Dad's bungalow. She was quite hysterical, screaming and weeping, and he was grim and steely.

" 'Keep her,' he said, 'while I go and get a mule cart.'

" 'You can't get one at this time of night,' said Dad to him.

" 'I'll get one,' he said, 'if I have to wake up every man in town.' And sure enough, in an hour he was back with a mule cart.

" 'Come on,' he said to his wife, 'bring the boy and get in!' She cried and implored, but he didn't take any notice.

" 'What are you going to do?' Mother asked him. She was rather nervous.

" 'Nothing desperate,' he said with a kind of chill smile, 'just take her down with me and keep her where she ought to have been all the time.'

"Well, Mother and Dad rather agreed with him . . . and so did most people. The other man just faded out. He'd had enough.

"Dad and Mother used to go out and visit them some-

times. Mother says that she was always weeping and imploring him to take her back to Salisbury. But he was quite grim about it. And quite reasonable. He said he had no money to live in Salisbury with her, and she was not going to live there alone again, or anywhere else. She used to make up all sorts of excuses, say she was ill and must see a doctor, any old lie she could rake up. But when he said he'd take her in to see one, she'd cry and say she wouldn't go. Mother says that he still loved her, but that he never forgave her, he was ashamed of himself for going on loving her. He thought he ought to have stopped loving her at once . . . just like that! As if one loves people for what they do or don't do! He tried not to love her. Mother says he used even to try and not look at her. He walked about and worked like the devil and was polite to her, but that was all.

"Well, there was one thing she didn't tell him, and that was that she was going to have a baby. She was terrified of telling him that. But at last, she couldn't keep it quiet any longer and she told him. She told him when Mother was there. It was terrible, Mother said. He didn't say anything, only went quite white, and then at last he said: 'All right, then, I'll take you in to Salisbury a month beforehand.' And not another word.

"He arranged for Dad to go down the night before she was due to go to Salisbury and stay with Charles. But just after Dad got there, she began to have awful pains and nearly went demented, and begged them to start for Salisbury at once. Well, they thought it was

madness to do that. Dad bolted off to the nearest kraal and brought back two native women (there wasn't a white woman for miles), and in about three hours Alice was born. If they'd started off she'd have been born on the roadside. . . . And her mother died.

"He never got over it really. He never could make up his mind whether it was his fault . . . whether if he'd taken her in to Salisbury, as she was always begging him to do, it would have saved her. I don't suppose it would really . . . I don't know. But it was pretty ghastly. He buried her miles away. . . . And that night he walked about the veldt from dusk till dawn and when he came back, he said he supposed he was a murderer. Dad sat and talked to him for hours, pointing out that it simply couldn't be just because she was on the veldt . . . other white women had had babies on the veldt. And after a time, he said: 'What about the baby?' The Old Man just stared at him as if he thought he was mad. 'Is the brat alive?' he said. Well, Alice was alive all right, and Dad brought her back to Salisbury and Mother looked after her.

"Well, after about six months, he came up and said he'd keep the baby. I don't know what he intended doing with it if he didn't keep it. He even looked at it! He arranged for it to be looked after in Salisbury, because he said he couldn't have it on the farm. And, after that, he didn't appear again . . . but Dad went down there occasionally and found him working like fury, and everywhere he went he took Charles with him, held him in



front of him on his horse. He was not communicative, however, and Dad discovered that he didn't want to have anything much to do with us, I think because he hated to think that anyone had seen him as miserable as he had been. He stuck down on the farm and began to make money and concentrated on Charles. After a few years he had Alice down there, but I gather she was never a great success. She was a most tiresome child . . . fearfully self-centred, rather like her mother in looks, but not nearly so pretty . . . and I suppose like her father in ways. He didn't take much notice of her, he stuck to Charles . . . and later sent her to school in Johannesburg. He kept Charles at home and had a tutor for him. By that time he was raking in the shekels. Sometimes Charles used to come and stay with us for a week or two . . . he was a nice boy . . . but his father loathed him to be away and they were devoted to each other. He never told Charles about his mother, but one day he heard it somewhere. I'm not sure how . . . some tattler babbling on. He went back to the farm and I suppose told his father he knew. We didn't see him again for a long time . . . and then he was different. You couldn't get a word out of him . . . he never mentioned Alice. But we gathered that he had sort of sworn a vow to himself never to let the Old Man down. . . . For a long time, though he never said anything, it was obvious that he couldn't bear to look at Alice. But, by and by, he settled down into a sort of polite tolerance . . . but Alice didn't help matters. She had the most odious manners. She used to prink



and preen and tell Charles that he ought to wait on her, she was a girl. I've seen Charles look as if he were going to be sick at times when she raised her eyebrows and smiled a silly, superior sort of smile. And why she did, I can't think, because she was by no means a 'popular favorite.'

"Well, the Old Man used to come up now and again on business. People liked him . . . but he always loathed the idea that they knew that old story. He had the stickiest sort of pride . . . and when Charles was old enough to take on, he practically gave up coming at all. Dad says he never stopped blaming himself for his wife's death. He brooded and brooded. Swung from a hatred of women . . . to a morbid self-loathing . . . and drummed into Charles the folly of trusting any woman. . . . And then the War came and Charles went home. That finished matters. Charles had always been an outlet. He talked to Charles. . . . But alone with that little brute Alice, he had nothing but a sort of living reminder of the past . . . he made terrific efforts not to become quite obsessed about her . . . (Charles told Dad all about it when he came back), and he brooded and brooded and kept up that sarcastic manner for public life, as it were . . . and then he started to drink. He did it deliberately whenever things became too much and he couldn't bear to think about them. And, well . . . I think that's about all. I suppose he can't stop it now. . . ."

"But why in Heaven's name didn't Charles tell me?" said Davida after a moment's pause.

"Oh, Charles . . ." said Betty. "He's as sticky as the Old Man. Before he went to England, you know, the Old Man was fairly normal . . . comparatively so, anyway. And when you got out here I suppose he just couldn't bear to. There are some things I think that you can't tell people who are fearfully close to you. Don't you know yourself how much easier it is sometimes to tell strangers intimate things? It seems silly . . . but I can imagine that somehow, when you were all down on the farm, he simply couldn't bring himself to come and say: 'Look here, you must understand this about the Old Man . . .'. It would be, in one way, sort of letting him down after he'd cultivated that sarcastic line of defence. But one thing I don't suppose Charles ever thought of . . . but I'll bet the Old Man thought you knew!"

"I wonder," said Davida thoughtfully.

"Well, I don't know . . . but I expect he did. He'd think even if Charles hadn't told you, that same other kind soul would have."

"But still," said Davida, "I don't think, do you, that it makes any difference. . . ."

Betty looked at her squarely.

"Well, I don't know," she said; "of course, we were all pretty livid over poor little Mark . . . but when you think about it . . . it was rather the past repeating itself. . . ."

"What on earth do you mean?" began Davida furiously.

"Oh, I know . . . it wasn't the same thing at all!

But you couldn't expect the Old Man to know that Mark was just advising you about Alice. He saw red. . . . Of course, Mark wasn't asking for all that he got . . . but he was asking for trouble, both from Charles and from his wife."

Davida went scarlet.

"Good Lord," exclaimed Betty, "d'you mean to tell me you didn't know he'd got a wife? My dear . . . some people called Boskins know her . . . she's on her way out. I should think she might arrive any day now. Davida . . . *don't* tell me you didn't know?"

Hot angry tears blinded Davida, she turned to the dressing-table and fumbled for a handkerchief.

"Davida," said Betty, in tones of sheer horror, "you weren't in love with him, were you?"

"No, I wasn't," said Davida angrily.

Betty said no more. It occurred to her young wisdom that it might be as well to let Davida think things over.

## II

Davida thought things over during dinner. She was distinctly preoccupied. The Thameses, who had a cheerful form of family badinage, appeared not to notice it.

Her first reaction was a state of sheer fury against Mark. Almost she applauded the Old Man. She was angry with the shaken rage of someone who feels they have been made a fool. And she knew also that although she

had almost deceived herself, whipping herself into a fury of injured innocence, that it had not been solely on Alice's account that she had sat up so late in the hotel lounge. In all the time that she had known him, he had never mentioned his wife, and talked always as if he were single. She could have forgiven him anything but his unspoken lie. She thought with a fierce scorn of her agonized indecision, her serene confidence that she had only to say to Mark: "I am yours!" for Charles to be prostrated . . . and vice versa! But as dinner progressed, Mark became less and less important. And by the time coffee arrived, she had forgiven him, so unimportant was he . . . so great a blessing was the fact that he was married.

"Betty," she said suddenly, "could you drive me down to the hospital?"

"I'll get the bus in two twos," said Betty.

### III

They argued at length with a stubborn nurse, until Betty drew her attention entirely upon herself, and Davida ran swiftly and silently along the corridor to Charles's room. She opened the door. Charles was reading. She saw that there was a blankness in his eyes . . . a strain about his lips.

"Charles!" she said.

He jumped and dropped the book.

"Holy Mike," he said, "what are you doing here? You'll be shot at dawn!"

"I know," said Davida, "but Betty is downstairs, distracting the attention of your warder."

"I wish," said Charles soberly, "that we had seen more of the Thameses during these last six months."

"I wish so, too," said Davida uncertainly. Her breath caught in a sob. "Oh, Charles, Charles!" she said, "do you want me?"

"Davida," he said, "Davida!"

She caught his hands, and dropped on her knees beside his bed. He bent forward and kissed her hair.

"I didn't know," she whispered, "I didn't know!"

For an instant he thought of the Old Man alone in the house he had intended for his son. But he put the thought from him. But there was no going back now, Davida was all that mattered. He pressed his lips to her hair again. In spite of his new-found happiness an acute pang shot through him at the thought of his father out there, alone, on the veldt. He remembered himself as a small boy, held before his father as he went riding; remembered the feel of the strong arms about his body.

He had expelled the thought. To seal up the door through which it had escaped he kissed Davida again, this time upon the mouth. That thought wouldn't come back again now; it was a long time since he had kissed her lips.

But to Davida, even as she clung blindly to him, and experienced the first genuine thrill of happiness she had

had for many a long day, came the Old Man's words: "You cannot build happiness upon the ruins of someone else's life."

The door was flung open violently, and an outraged nurse appeared.

"*Really*, Mrs. Bruce!" she exclaimed.

Charles laughed.

Davida stood up. "It was important," she said.

"*Well . . . !*"

"All right, nurse, don't get agitated. You know I'm better now."

"Still . . ." said the nurse. "I've never heard of such a thing!"

Charles and Davida glanced at one another. In spite of themselves they were overcome by a sensation of guilt. They felt like children who had been caught drawing pictures on the blackboard by a stern master.

"I'm just going," said Davida. "Charles, we'll fix everything up to-morrow."

Davida squeezed his hand and went.

"Well, Mr. Bruce!" said the nurse.

"Oh, it's all right," said Charles, "don't you say anything, nurse."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

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### I

MR. THAMES received the news that Davida intended to stay with Charles with a subdued pleasure.

"That's splendid," he said, "but, of course, a job managing someone else's farm isn't very well paid."

"But," said Davida, "what else can we do?"

"Well, of course, there aren't very many good jobs to be had in this country," he said, "very few . . . very few. . . ."

He shook his head, looked at his watch and hurried away.

Davida was left with the flat feeling of one who has intended to delight and has only succeeded in raising a mild interest.

Betty laughed.

"Don't be so blighted," she said, "he'll probably raise some fearfully well-paid job for Charles. He's very fond of him, you know."

They were just finishing breakfast. Davida was full of a content that she had not known for months. The monotonous chant of a native who was rolling the lawn was enchanting to her. The warm patches of sunlight that fell across the breakfast-table through the drawn



curtains filled her with a vague pleasure. A patch fell across Betty's hair, turning it to rich chestnut; her face was in the shadow and she leant her chin on her hands and stared at Davida thoughtfully.

"Going to the hospital this morning?" she asked.

Davida nodded.

"Going to see Mark at all?" pursued Betty.

Davida flushed. She had been pushing the thought of seeing Mark away, refusing to recognize its urgent summons. What earthly good could be done by seeing him? She wanted to get away with Charles as quickly as possible . . . away from Salisbury and the disturbing proximity of Mark. She was sorry for him . . . perturbed about him . . . afraid still that in spite of his wife he might demand something of her. And supposing his wife left him? Heaven knew what stories she might not hear the moment she arrived . . . what construction might be put upon the whole wretched affair.

"I don't know . . ." she said.

"Better get it over," said Betty pensively. "He's got to be got over, I do think."

"I suppose so," said Davida reluctantly.

She stood up.

"I'll see him this morning," she said.

And since there was no point in waiting she went along to her room and put on her hat.

At the hospital a too-unconcerned nurse showed her into Mark's room. He was sitting up in an easy chair that was turned from the light, and when he saw her, he made

an exclamation and instinctively put his hand over his mouth. Davida wondered whether her smile was as stiffly unnatural as it felt: it felt like a grimace carved across her face.

"Oh God!" he said, and put out a hand as if to ward her off.

She had the odd feeling that he expected her to try and kiss him and she saw enmity in his eyes.

There was a pause that seemed to her to lengthen into hours while she did not know what to say or do and still Mark sat still with a hand hiding his mouth.

Suddenly he said in a difficult, unfamiliar voice, as if words were hard to form:

"How the hell am I to explain this . . . ?"

The shocked pity in her voice changed.

"I should just tell the truth," she said in a small, even voice. "I should just say that you were terribly sorry for Alice and myself, and that you just kissed my hand . . . in sympathy . . . when the Old Man burst in . . . and . . . misunderstood. . . . It seems to me that that is the simplest. . . ."

"Oh, my God," he said again in a fury of weak irritation, "you don't know my wife!"

"But anyone reasonable—" began Davida.

"She's not reasonable," he said in his muffled, odd voice. "She doesn't understand these things . . . she's not at all modern. . . ."

"What things?" said Davida icily.

He made a familiar impatient movement with his shoulders.

"She doesn't understand that people are apt to fall in love . . . casually. . . . She's, well—she's thoroughly narrow."

There was an acrid edge to his voice as if he included both Davida and his wife as active agents conspiring against his happiness.

"And, God . . . what do I look like?" he said hysterically.

"I'm terribly sorry . . ." said Davida. "Oh, Mark . . . I'm horribly sorry. . . ."

"Have you . . . what did you say to your husband?" he asked.

"I told him exactly what happened," she said.

"And what did he say?"

For a moment he dropped the hand that hid his mouth and she saw that it was a straight purplish slit that made his thin face inconceivably cruel, and she remembered that his mouth had always been hard.

"He said nothing that need alarm you," she said.

"He won't try to sue for a divorce, or anything?" he asked eagerly.

She shook her head.

"I suppose Alice would back us up?" he said thoughtfully.

She flushed violently.

"I don't see, Mark, what there is for her to back us

up about. After all, there is nothing criminal in talking in Meikle's lounge with the night porter wandering about. . . ."

"But you don't know my wife . . . I tell you she doesn't understand. She's completely Victorian. . . ."

A spasm of acute irritation swept over Davida. She had no longer any pity. His obvious consciousness of guilt and his weak laments made her feel cheap and ashamed. If his wife felt like that, why did he go about behaving in such a way, leaving that trail of deceit and discomfort over everything? She felt she must get away at all costs.

"Well . . . I'm terribly sorry . . . Mark . . . anything we can do . . . you must let us know. . . ."

That blessed "us" that allied Charles with her! She clung to it, grasped with intense relief that comfortable matrimonial pronoun.

Mark seemed to find comfort in it also. He brightened perceptibly. She felt his relief that she was not to be thrown on his hands radiating from him.

"Well, good-bye," she said hurriedly, "let us know . . . won't you?"

"Oh, thanks," he said in his muffled voice.

She turned and went out of the room without offering to shake hands, and as she closed the door behind her a slender dark woman came hurrying down the corridor with a nurse. She looked at Davida with large, dark, rather stupid eyes, in which were mixed anxiety and suspicion. Her clothes were travel-stained and dowdy, ladylike. She hesitated a moment and then brushed by

and into Mark's room. Davida heard an exclamation . . . but she fled down the corridor to Charles's room, shaken and humiliated.

## II

She was altogether shaken. With a distinct sense of shock she realized that Charles's threat to "punch the blighter's head" had filled her, not with the disapproval of a civilized apostle of reason, but with a quite savage glow of pleasure.

Charles insisted that he would not have his leg broken and re-set until later. First he would get up and see to things! Exactly what he meant by "things" she did not quite know. She had an uneasy feeling that he meant to go down to the farm, and she distrusted the Old Man's influence. He was fidgety and nervy, angry at being still kept in bed, or in a chair with his leg propped up. And she knew that he also suffered from the state of indecision. Until the Old Man had been told definitely and it had been arranged what she and Charles should do, there was that maddening unsettled feeling, the sensation that something might happen any minute to upset all her plans. And Charles, she knew, had not yet told his father. And, in spite of herself, she could not altogether banish a depressing vision of her father-in-law, alone, and brandy-sodden, lonely and defeated on the farm. "It's all very trying," she said to herself, trying to bring the matter into an everyday irritation. But her

eyes darkened, and she became sombre and thoughtful at odd moments.

Nor would Mr. Thames commit himself on the subject of a job for Charles. "I'll talk it over with him when he's out of hospital," he said. "My dear young lady, you really mustn't try and arrange his life for him as if he were a little boy. Charles, I am sure, will have quite definite ideas on what he wants to do."

And she was conscious of an expectancy on the part of the Thameses that vaguely alarmed her. As if they did not quite agree that the matter was settled. She began to feel that she must act drastically and promptly and settle the thing herself.

And then Mrs. Lill became suddenly active. She found several interested people in the hotel, who on the shortest acquaintanceship fed her with sympathy and erroneous facts. She took up the attitude that Davida had ruined her home and marriage and had had designs upon Mark. She insisted that until Davida had led Mark astray by sitting up with him into the small hours, he had never so much as looked at another woman, and that though, of course, she would stick to him and try and make something of life for him, it was dreadful to think that he had been disfigured for life through the idle whim of a flirtatious woman.

It spread like wildfire, and people who hitherto had regarded the affair as simply an example of the Old Man's ungovernable temper and outrageous suspicions, began to ask one another whether after all there might

not be something more in it. "After all," they said, "if Mrs. Lill says these things, she must have some reason."

"Silly fools!" observed Betty. "And I should have thought that the Lill woman would have had more pride. Even if she believed it, surely it was better to pretend that he was entirely misjudged and to include Davida in the misjudgment. If I thought my husband was such a fool as she makes Mark out to be, I'd keep it dark for my own sake!"

"But Mrs. Lill is not a particularly intelligent woman," said her father, "she doesn't see that she's letting herself and her husband down . . . she is simply obsessed with a desire to gain pity and she's jealous of Davida and doesn't see that, by blackguarding her, she's also blackguarding Lill."

"Well, I think it's high time Charles was up and about!" said Betty.

But Mrs. Lill's point of view percolated down to Alice and brought her to Salisbury on a holiday, hot and protesting.

She overwhelmed Davida with sympathy.

"As if enough harm hadn't been done," she babbled, "by that old beast. . . ."

Davida held up her hand wearily.

"Oh, shut up, Alice," she said, "do leave the Old Man out of it. . . ."

Alice stared at her with a wide-eyed and hurt expression.



"I should think," she said stiffly, "that I am entitled to say what I like about my father. . . ."

"I don't think so," said Davida, "it's damn bad form . . . d'you talk like this to other people? . . ."

"No, I don't," said Alice, but a bright flood of crimson that swept her face betrayed her.

"Not that it matters," said Davida edgily and bitterly, "because he isn't your father."

Alice stepped back and went first a sickly white colour and then a vivid scarlet.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Just what I said," said Davida coldly, "so you can stop going about saying what an unnatural parent he is . . . and take a look at his side of the case for a change!"

She knew she was being unkind, but she was feeling badgered and miserable, and, for once, like Charles, she saw in Alice the source of the whole miserable business.

But a gleam crept into Alice's eyes that showed a mounting excitement. In point of fact, she foresaw, though half-unconscious of it, a new and romantic limelight shining upon her.

"What do you mean?" she demanded again with her head flung back theatrically.

"Sit down," said Davida tersely, "and I'll tell you."

She told her unemotionally and briefly. Alice sat still, staring in front of her. And at the end, Alice said in a shaking voice: "You don't know what a load you have

lifted from my heart!" She clasped her hands and gazed reverently upwards.

"I'm terribly pleased to hear it," said Davida amiably.

Alice stood up and walked over to the window. . . .

"You know that horrible night of the dance?" she asked.

"Well, ever since then I've been haunted . . . I thought it must be heredity . . . that I had inherited a tendency to drink from the Old Man . . . that's why I said I wouldn't marry Piet."

Davida supposed that she would never change . . . all her life she would indulge in histrionics. How much of it she herself believed to be sincere, no one would ever know.

"Are you going to marry him now?" she asked Alice dryly.

Alice put her head on one side and pondered.

"I never saw anything so studied in my life," thought Davida.

"I don't think so," said Alice. "After all, we are not very suited . . . we don't exactly move in the same circles. . . . What I mean is . . . we haven't many interests in common . . . and I don't know that it's a good thing . . . different nations intermarrying . . . But I like him very much . . . I think he's awfully nice in his own way. . . ."

"Well, that's that," said Davida, who felt that Piet was more fortunate than otherwise in losing Alice.

Alice sighed: "Poor boy . . . but he'll get over it.

Oh, Davida . . . can I do anything to help you at all? I should like to kill Mrs. Lill. . . .”

“Don’t bother,” retorted Davida. “No, thanks very much, you can’t do anything. . . .”

Alice looked at her with an intense registration of sympathy and let the matter drop.

She stayed the night and talked continuously about a new and free life. The Old Man’s story seemed to have filled her with a sense of being an extremely interesting individual.

“My dear,” said Betty, “was it wise to tell her? She’ll probably come over all Bohemian on the strength of it . . . she feels now that she’s the most romantic thing that ever happened on this earth. . . .”

“Lord,” said Davida, “I don’t really care what she does. . . .”

They were in her bedroom and she dropped down wearily on the edge of the bed and sat with her hands cupped under her chin.

“Oh, don’t let it get you down,” said Betty. “It’s all perfectly sickening. I wish Mrs. Lill would take Mark home . . . but she seems to rather like it out here. I should imagine that she’s never been very important before. In England, she probably was just one of thousands, leading a sober life and giving tea-parties . . . but with nothing about her to interest anyone. Whereas out here she is the—what d’you call it?—the ‘cynosure of all eyes’ . . . and she’s enjoying it. . . .”

“Confound her,” said Davida moodily.

Betty chuckled.

"She even began to talk about suing for damages . . . but Dad went round and saw her and dropped a few casual words about the folly of thinking such things, and she shut up. . . ."

"But, Betty," exclaimed Davida nervously, "do you think she will? . . ."

"I don't think so," said Betty, relapsing into seriousness. "After all, as Dad pointed out to her, if she did and the Old Man chose to be unpleasant, Heaven only knows what he might not say in court, and it wouldn't really redound to her husband's credit if the Old Man pleaded justification. I mean, he might say that he considered it justification that Mark was sitting up with you at two o'clock in the morning and kissing your hand. . . . She's got Mark out of hospital and into the hotel and he stays up in the bedroom and she goes about saying how terribly sensitive he is . . . touting for sympathy all over the place . . . but cheer up, Davida, we all combat her on every occasion. She's really a stupid woman . . . thoroughly small town, you know. . . ."

She stood up. . . .

"Good night, old thing . . . don't take it to heart. Dad is going to try and see Mark and persuade him that it would be far the best thing for him to take his wife back to England and tell a story about being mauled by a leopard or something!"

Davida sat on for some time. Her eyes looked strained and tired. She foresaw herself being for ever haunted

by Mrs. Lill, who would like Rhodesia so much that she would stay on there, growing with the years more and more of a halo, until at last she sank into a sanctified grave. "Oh, Lord," she thought wearily, "what a fool I've been . . . what a beastly muddle . . . I wish I could go away with Charles, miles out into the veldt away from it all. We'd better go prospecting, I should think. . . ."

She laughed weakly at herself and went to bed.

### III

Mr. Thames went to see Charles.

"You see," he said after much earnest conversation, "she's a pestilential woman because she's so convinced that she's right. Nothing will make her see any other point of view except her own: it's like a holy war to her. . . ."

"Then," said Charles with a flicker of a smile, "I should imagine that the only thing to stop her would be to make war myself with an equal unreason and inability to see anyone else's point of view. . . ."

Mr. Thames looked uncomfortable.

"Don't do anything rash," he murmured. "Perhaps a little, shall we say firmness, is needed . . . but . . ."

"A little firmness shall be used," said Charles.

"What," asked Mr. Thames, tapping the ground anxiously with his heel, "are you going to do, Charles?"

Charles's eyes became withdrawn for a moment. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Get a job . . . as far away as possible, and try and make some money. . . ."

"I suppose," said Mr. Thames sadly, "it's the only thing. . . ."

"'Fraid so . . . you couldn't expect Davida . . ."

"No . . . no . . . no . . ." said Mr. Thames hastily, "but I was fond of your father. . . ."

"So am I, sir," said Charles wearily. . . .

"I hear," said Mr. Thames thoughtfully, "that things have been very quiet down your way for the last week. You know how news travels . . . but he's been burning things. . . ."

"Burning things?" said Charles.

"Yes . . . clothes and things. I felt rather alarmed . . . but I made tactful inquiries and he seems all right . . . quite normal, I mean . . . young Barneveldt passes through the farm pretty frequently. . . ."

Charles's lips twitched and he straightened his tie. He was sitting in a long chair by the open window. A heavy scent from some shrub drifted in and both men felt suddenly the effect of loneliness, of the veldt . . . of the long, hot, silent days . . . and the dreaming nights. . . .

Mr. Thames coughed and stood up.

"I must get along," he said. . . .

He stood up, dusted his trouser knees and went away.

Charles, haggard and with a tired smile, sat on, looking down the lane of memory.

## IV

Next day, about eleven o'clock, there came a telephone message from Davida to say that she had gone down to the farm to bring back her own and Alice's clothes. It gave him a kind of numb shock. Whenever he had thought about the homestead, it had always been with Davida's things scattered about there, her bedroom with her scent bottles on the dressing-table, even her sponge and toothbrush on the washing-stand . . . her books in the living-room. She was taking them all away. It gave a finality to things . . . it left the homestead looted and sacked. . . . He wondered with a wry smile whether she were also bringing up all his things. If she were, it would fill up the car rather. And she had taken Betty and Mallin with her . . . for support . . . moral support? He shrugged his shoulders. Of course, it was inevitable. She couldn't feel as he did about it all . . . she couldn't feel the intense pity . . . the understanding. Nobody could expect her to do so. . . . He swore violently under his breath for three minutes. . . .

A nurse came in and began to put out boiling water in preparation for the doctor's arrival.

"Is Featherstone downstairs?" said Charles.

"He'll be up any minute, Mr. Bruce. . . ."



"Oh . . . well I'm going to Meikle's this afternoon. . . ."

"Oh, Mr. Bruce . . . you can't . . . why I've never heard of such a thing!"

"It'll be a pleasant new experience then," said Charles.

As the nurse often said to her friends: "He's got such a funny look, Mr. Bruce . . . kind of glares through you, as if he didn't see you and yet was amused at something. . . ."

Dr. Featherstone appeared at the door.

"What'll be a pleasant new experience?" he said brightly.

"My visit to Meikle's this afternoon," observed Charles.

"Nonsense!"

"I've got important business . . . you can break my leg again later. . . . In the meantime you can provide a nice strong stick and a car and give me good advice!"

Featherstone shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if you promise to come straight back and rest. . . ."

Charles grinned at him.

"I'll rest like the devil when this is all over," he promised.

"Well, now let's have a look at you," said the doctor.

The nurse, pleasantly excited, fluttered about in the background. She was going out with a young farmer that afternoon. She'd be able to tell him something about those Bruces!

## V

Mrs. Lill sat in the lounge at five o'clock. Several people were having cocktails. One or two people were anticipating the going down of the sun. She felt pleasantly thrilled and virtuous. All that she had heard about the loose habits of Rhodesians was being fulfilled before her eyes. They drank. They flirted. They were without conscience. Deeply she resented Mark's behaviour . . . but still more deeply, almost without realizing it, she appreciated the fact that some woman had endeavoured to seduce Mark. Well . . . as always happened . . . if you went astray you paid for it . . . poor Mark had paid for it. She was more convinced than ever that the straight and narrow path was the only one . . . and that her conception of the straight and narrow path was the only true one. Nobody sat up till two o'clock without some discreditable motive. She settled herself in her chair and with a pained expression began to tell her audience, two women and one man, about Mark's virtue and Davida's faults. Her dark hair was very neatly done and her brown frock was nondescript and uninteresting, she had good teeth and a schoolmistressish voice.

"One doesn't really know the best thing to do," she said as she poured out some tea. "We might go home, of course . . . but poor Mark . . . to face all the questions that his appearance will arouse . . . I don't know

what we could say . . . and our friends would be so shocked to hear about it all. . . .”

She stopped, arrested by an expression of deep discomfort on the part of her audience, and turned her head to see Charles standing just by her, leaning on two sticks with an unpleasantly amused look in his eyes.

“Mrs. Lill,” he said, “I am immensely interested to know whether the sentiments you have been expressing so publicly for some time are also your husband’s. . . .”

She went a dull red, but her dark stupid eyes did not change; they looked at Charles like two shining black stones and her mouth became prim and reproving.

“I wonder,” she said acidly, “that you have the impertinence to speak to me . . . you or any of your family. . . .”

Charles’s eyes became dangerous and chill.

“In that case,” he said, “I’ll speak to your husband. . . .”

He turned and limped away.

Mrs. Lill looked triumphantly at her audience, but they did not seem happy.

“I say,” said one of the women, “you know . . . if I were you, I’d go and speak to him. He—he might be rather unpleasant to your husband. . . .”

Mrs. Lill became rigid.

“He would not dare . . .” she began. But in their eyes she read their disbelief that Mark could cope with Charles, and flushed again slowly.

She half-stood up and then sat down again.

"I cannot see what he can do," she said primly.

"He's got a name for doing things . . ." murmured the woman who had spoken before.

"In that case," said Mrs. Lill briskly, "I'll go and get rid of him. . . ."

She found him in the hall, speaking to the manager, who paid him a deference that was not accorded to Mark. She resented it, thinking of her small circle of friends in England who moved contentedly and importantly about a small village.

When he saw her he nodded to the manager and limped towards her.

"I'm just going up to see your husband," he said politely.

The manager had vanished. There was no one else in the entrance at the moment. She felt a little afraid, conscious that it would not be easy to stop him, even nervously aware that the sympathy she had found so easy to obtain would not go farther than words . . . that really the true stream of active sympathy ran towards Charles. These people's loyalties were for him . . . not for her and Mark.

"He can't see you," she said in a tone that strove to keep the poise of a housewife dismissing an importunate hawker.

"Indeed," said Charles, and limped towards the stairs. She got in front of him.

"He doesn't want to see you," she insisted.

"That is very probable," said Charles grimly. "But I want to see him."

"Nobody but a cad would force himself on an injured man," she said tritely, and in a voice that hinted at tears.

"But then," said Charles, "you are libelling my wife, and I am going to find out whether it is with your husband's approval or not . . . I have quite a lot to say to him."

His eyes were steely. She thought she had never seen anyone look so dangerous.

"I shall ring for the porter," she cried. "You shan't see him. . . ."

Charles raised his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders and began to walk up the stairs, stepping past her without a word.

"But what do you want?" she said agitatedly.

Charles turned and looked at her.

"I want him to get out of this town on to-morrow's mail," he said tersely. "And I am going to see he goes. . ."

"You have no right . . ." she said breathlessly.

"Your husband will see my point," said Charles, and he smiled.

She had had ideas of getting Charles and his wife ostracized . . . of making them pay for what they had done. And she was aware now that she could not do it . . . that the very people who had listened so sympathetically would, when it came to the point, stick by Charles, who was one of them, whom they knew. And she knew, too, that Mark would turn and rend her in

a nervous fury if he knew the way she had been talking. He could be sulky and bitter for days together, when he seemed to enjoy making her unhappy. . . .

"We are going to-morrow . . . or if not to-morrow . . . by the next mail," she said. "I'm only waiting for my husband to be quite fit to travel. . . ."

Charles looked through her, and beyond her, and then came down one step.

"In that case, I can spare myself the trouble of an interview that would be most unpleasant," he said. "I hope you will have a pleasant journey."

He left her full of an angry feeling that for once virtue had not been triumphant. She was under no illusions. Mark would not stand for anything like that . . . he would be wild if he heard about it . . . he wanted to get away . . . he was afraid of the Bruces. She went back to the lounge, groping mentally for the flaw that had let down the proverbial triumph of virtue, and she knew it.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

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### I

ALREADY, with the first rains, the little sluggish streams had become small torrents. The car slid uneasily down the steep drifts, and splashed and bumped through the muddy water, labouring up the opposite sides with slipping wheels. When they turned off the main road the tall wet grass swished along the sides of the car, and the veldt lay waiting to burgeon and star the grass with flowers.

"More rain coming," said Mallin, glancing up at the sky. "Bad rain."

They could only go slowly. Once the car stuck in a wet *vlei*, and they had to wait for a farmer's oxen to pull them out. They came to the bush that bordered Oliver's farm. A band of small monkeys gibbered and screamed at them, escorting them a part of the way, until something else caught their attention and they swung away through the trees. A jay flashed by like a streak of blue silk. Once a snake drowsing on a sunny rock reared a malignant head, and slithered away into the shadows. But when they came into the open *vlei*, round the old huts, Davida saw smoke curling up through the thin air. It startled her. It came from the back of the



kitchen hut. She had so often seen that lazy curl of smoke, when the Templemans were there, that for a moment she wondered if she was dreaming. And then she was sure that she was dreaming, for, sitting on the raised step of the living hut, was Oliver. His elbows rested on his knees, and his hands dangled idly. She touched Betty on the shoulder.

"Stop for a moment or two, will you?" she said.

When Betty stopped, she got out of the car and walked to the hut.

"Oliver!" she said incredulously.

"Even I," he said, and smiled at her.

His fingers fumbled at his belt, and his old khaki shirt was faded and torn at the shoulder.

"But Oliver, my dear," she said, "I thought you were in England."

He glanced over his shoulder at the kitchen hut.

"Did Pelham sell the place?" he asked.

"No. . . . He nearly did. But something went wrong. I'll tell you some time."

"Oh, Lord!" he said wearily, "so I owe him about a hundred quid. Not that it matters. I can probably pay it soon."

"But what have you been doing?" she demanded.

"Wandering around. Davida, come and sit down under the trees. My—er—my partner is by the kitchen."

They strolled over to the mimosa tree which Lydia had always called the forest.

Oliver sat down and stared moodily at the ground. He began to fiddle with the small twigs that lay about.

"Have a cigarette?" said Davida.

He took one, lit it, and sighed.

"Haven't had one for two months, Davida. Bad for my nerves to be without them."

"Why didn't you go home?"

"Well, you know, somehow I couldn't. I couldn't go home and eat the fatted calf at Lydia's expense. Somehow I couldn't see myself doing it . . . could you, Davida? I couldn't sit down flatly and enjoy life and be patted on the back as the returned prodigal, while Lydia suffered as she must suffer. Besides, what damned good is an income to me without Lydia? I've got one now . . . I'd give it to that fellow over there and go off again, only he wouldn't take it."

"But you make what Lydia did quite useless," said Davida sorrowfully. "She made sure you would be all right if she went back. Oliver, it seems an awful tragedy . . . Lydia would have starved quite gladly. It was only because she couldn't bear to make things worse for you that she went."

"I haven't made it useless, really," he said. "It was useless, anyway. Nobody but a cur could have profited by it. . . ."

"But, Oliver, it's not reasonable. . . ."

"Damn reason!" he said bitterly. "What's reason got to do with love? Lydia didn't do it because it was reasonable. She did it because she loved me. If she had reasoned

she would have known that I would not go back. If I had reasoned I would have gone back, saying 'It won't help Lydia if I don't.' I'd have gone back, and I suppose reason would have stopped me feeling a low cur. It doesn't help Lydia that I haven't gone back. But it's kept me a little worthy of what she did. And now, when it's too late, I shall probably have more money than I shall want."

He looked miserably at Davida, whose eyes were dreaming.

She put out her hand and touched his arm.

"And what have you been doing?" she asked.

"Prospecting. I fell in with this fellow coming back on the train. We got off at Gwelo. He was prospecting. Said that it was the only thing in the world when you didn't care two hoots whether you lived or died. He said it was a dog's life, but if you couldn't make money any other way you might as well wander about and see if you could find gold. Anyway, we found it. Gold sticking up in lumps. We're on our way to Salisbury to finance it. I thought I'd like to see the place again, so I came this way . . ." He was silent for a moment or two, and then a glow came into his eyes. "Lydia can't come back to me now," he said. "She can't break faith with that brute: she wouldn't. But if this mine is what we think it is, I'll come back here and build a house, and I'll do all that Lydia and I talked of doing. And I'll wait for her. I suppose one's got to pay for breaking the law, and Lydia and I are paying this way. But I feel curiously

certain that he will die before we do. He's an oldish man, and when she's seen it through she will come back. But if I had gone home and accepted the fatted calf, she would never have come back. . . ."

Davida sat silent, her hands clasped round her bent knees. She too felt curiously prophetic, convinced that some day Lydia would come back.

"You'd better come over and see what Finlac has for scoff," he said. "He's a funny fellow. Morose, but a good sort."

"Thanks awfully," said Davida, "but I really must go on.

"I've got to get to the farm, and then back to Salisbury to-night," she added by way of explanation.

They strolled back towards the car.

"I'll see you in Salisbury," said Davida to Oliver, as Betty started the car.

"Of course," said Betty as they went on, "it's awful fun chatting with the friends of one's girlhood and all that sort of thing, but I see no hope of getting back to Salisbury to-night. It will be another of those old scandals of being lost on the veldt. It's going to pour with rain. Mallie will have to marry me after this."

"I'm frightfully sorry," said Davida.

"Oh, that's all right," said Betty cheerfully. "It's the first time I've been lost on the veldt."

They drove on, but Sylvester had to haul them out of his wet *vlei*. By the time they got to the Old Man's house it was dusk.

## II

They drew up outside the silent house. A light glimmered in the Old Man's quarters. Over in the compound someone coughed retchingly . . . there came the thrum of a Kaffir piano. It was chokingly familiar. The heavy clouds made it dark and gloomy. There were no stars. Betty blew a long blast on the horn.

The Old Man's door opened, an oblong of orange light fell across the veranda. He came slowly along.

Davida wondered where Mac was. He usually appeared automatically.

"Who's there?" said the Old Man.

"It's me!" said Davida. Her voice sounded small and foolish in the silence.

The thrumming of the Kaffir piano suddenly stopped and the sound of padding feet came towards them from the compound.

"Who's 'me'?" said the Old Man; his voice had a mocking cadence.

"Davida!"

There was silence for a moment.

"Oh, Davida," said the Old Man, "what do you want?"

"She wants her clothes," said Betty clearly.

"Not only Davida . . . but Betty," said the Old Man. "Why don't you come in, instead of sitting out there?"

A lamp shone in the dining-room and Mac appeared on the veranda.

"Come in," said the Old Man, "come in. I expect Mac can produce some dinner."

Betty switched off the engine and got out of the car. Davida followed her and Mallin. They went on to the veranda.

"It's rather dark," said the Old Man, "but in a minute Mac will light the lamps."

He led them into the dining-room and there Davida gasped. He had shaved. Without his beard he was more startlingly like Charles than ever. His blue eyes were haggard . . . his mouth, no longer bland, but stern. He smiled at them.

"An abominably lazy habit conquered," he said amiably.

"I like you better without it," said Betty.

"You always did, Betty," he said.

Betty ran her hand through her curly hair.

"I can't think why you ever grew it," she said.

"I've told you," he said, "laziness!"

Davida looked at him curiously. There was something strange, something more than the shaven chin. Something was missing. With a quick shock, she realized that he hadn't got his sjambok.

Mac came in with a tray with whisky and soda.

Betty sat down in front of the fireplace. Mallin stood uncertainly in the background.

Betty said: "You'll have to put us up for the night and save our reputations. We shall never get back . . . it's going to pour."

"I think I can do that . . . though it's a long time since we put anybody up here. Davida can pack tomorrow morning. To-night, she can act as hostess!"

"In that case," said Davida (she felt as if she must fight against enchantment: the Old Man was a stranger, terrible, strange!) "I'll take Betty along and show her her bedroom. Will you show Mr. Mallin his?"

She took Betty along to Alice's room. It was bare and tidy, devoid of atmosphere. The boards of the floor, once stained, had been scrubbed bare. There was a smell of soap. . . .

Betty looked at Davida.

"I wonder why he's shaved," she said. "He grew that beard while Charles was away. . . ."

"I don't know," said Davida.

"I should imagine," said Betty cheerfully, "that it's because he feels ten years younger since Alice has departed."

Davida found a nightdress for Betty, and Mac came with towels and hot water. She left her and went along to her own room.

Her own room was the same. Even the things she had left lying about were not touched. It was infinitely quiet. In Salisbury there had been noises . . . the sound of a gramophone . . . the changing gears of a car. Laughter drifting across the night. Here the silence could almost be felt.

The quietude was like a benison. Her jangled nerves subsided. The Old Man, clean-shaven, with his stern



mouth and jutting thrust of jaw, his white hair and clear blue eyes, was no longer formidable.

She went on to the veranda. The Old Man was there, looking out over his garden, which lay still and misty in the starlight.

She told him nervously about Charles. "He'll really be all right," she said.

"That will be delightful," he observed. "There will be no need for you to stay, now, will there?"

He put his hands into his coat pockets and leant against the wall.

"What . . . to-night?" said Davida in some bewilderment.

"No," he said, "in Rhodesia. You can go home with a clear conscience . . . after all, I want Charles back here."

"But I'm not going back," she said. "I'm staying with Charles . . . he'll get a job somewhere."

He said nothing more, until she told him that she had come to fetch Alice's clothes. And then he gave a short laugh.

"I'm afraid you're too late, my dear . . . I've burnt them. . . ."

She stared at him as though he were mad.

"I'll send her some money to buy others," he added. "Any future dealings I have with her will be through my solicitors.

"I think," he went on, almost as if he were talking

to himself, "that it would have been better if I'd always dealt with her through my solicitors."

"And so you and Charles are going to stay out here, and get a job . . . a farm manager's screw is, I believe, about fifteen to twenty pounds a month. . . ."

Betty was heard in the living-room, wrangling amiably with Mallin.

"Will you build me a house like this?" she was saying. Mallin's answer was indistinguishable.

"We'd better go in," said the Old Man.

### III

Davida spent most of the night doggedly packing, and when she had finished, she was too tired to sleep. She looked at her trunks and tried to feel a glow of accomplishment, of freedom attained, but she was only conscious of a vague unhappiness.

She went quietly out of her room and on to the veranda. There was still a light showing in the Old Man's room. She looked at her watch. Three o'clock. The moon was on the wane.

She went into Charles's room and took down one of his guns, and then out at the back and down the track towards the wheat. It was an oppressive night. Once two green points of light glared at her from the side of the track. She walked straight on and they wavered and vanished.

But when she came to the wheat *vlei*, there was still light from the moon, and the old baboon kept his eternal watch on the kopje. The wheat "lands" flowed up to its foot, and they were covered with shooting wheat, the tiny green shoots marched in serried ranks under the eye of the baboon as he sat hunched and contemplative under the moon.

She stood with her hands pressed against her breast and stared at it. It must have been done while she mooned about, listless and angry with the Old Man. Charles must have done it in his odd moments . . . taken the oxen unobtrusively.

She sat there for a long time. Nothing came near. The baboon did not seem to notice her; but when the sky paled into dawn and she turned to go, he yawped triumphantly, as if the wheat were now his.

In answer there came a startling shout. "A-ah, you *schellum* . . . a-ah!"

She turned and saw Piet Barneveldt riding towards her through the morning. There was something different about him, a new confidence. He was no longer the shy, dark youth who had talked with Alice on the veranda at the Thames'.

"It looks good, the wheat," he said. "The Old Man finished it good."

"Who?" she said sharply.

"The Old Man," he answered, "after you were in Salisbury. I saw him sometimes . . . he said funny things. When I explained to him about Miss Alice . . .

that it was not a running-away we did together . . . he said: 'I always credited you with a little common sense . . . I am relieved to find I was not mistaken . . .'

Involuntarily Davida laughed.

"And where are you going to now?" she asked.

He flushed.

"To breakfast at the Sylvesters'," he said.

Davida looked at him.

"Yes . . ." he added, "I was mistaken . . . it was always, really, Miss Sylvester. We shall be married soon."

He walked by her side until they reached her house, and then he rode on through the brightening morning.

Davida stood and watched him. It seemed that Alice had left no trace behind her . . . there was nothing left of the years she had spent on the farm.

Already the sky was a pale, soft blue . . . the clouds were faint smudges in the sky . . . the track wound like a rust-coloured snake down to the little river . . . and a car came along it. She saw that it was Charles who sat beside the Indian chauffeur.

#### IV

She stood and watched the "boys" piling luggage into the two cars. Charles was in his father's room. Betty and Mallin were down at the stables.

Mac came out with Charles's gun-cases. . . .

The unhappiness that had been with her all morning swept over her, engulfing her. She flung her convictions

to the four winds . . . in reality they had ceased to be convictions when Betty had told her about the Old Man. . . .

"Take the luggage off," she said to Mac.

Without surprise he began to unload the cars.

Davida ran along the veranda to the Old Man's room, and flung open the door.

Charles was sitting in a chair, leaning forward, his hands clasped tightly between his knees. The Old Man stood with his back to him, staring out of the window.

"I'm not going," she said breathlessly. "Don't let's go . . . let's stay."

They both stared at her. Her cheeks were crimson, her eyes shining with tears.

Charles held out his hand.

The Old Man gave a deep sigh.

"It may be," he said, "that it will be a better threesome than it was a foursome."

Davida held out her hand to him.

"Why did you do my wheat for me?" she asked.

He raised his eyebrows and smiled like Charles.

"You're the first woman I have heard of," he said, "whose heart was set on a patch of wheat. It seemed a pity not to fulfil so original a desire."

V

There it was. She couldn't say why she had so impulsively changed her mind and decided to stay on in the

homestead. Possibly it was something to do with the dazzling sunshine, and the abiding peace that seemed to have descended. Now that she *had* decided, the peace flowed about her and something sang in her heart. It was nothing to do with Charles . . . nothing to do with his hand-clasp . . . or with Betty's warm approval. She was happy, and something sang in her heart for some other reason . . . something that was entirely her own . . . something inward that took no account of reason and material things.

Betty and Mallin had gone riding. Charles was talking to his father, and Davida leant against the veranda post and looked out at the little rise in the *vlei*, where her house was going to be. Her own house . . . Since the Old Man stuck to his idea . . . they would have separate households . . . it would be rather fun. . . . She leant there, relaxed and happy, her eyes soft and dreaming. It was curious how, without Alice, the tension was no more. It was as if Alice, thinking always about herself, pitying herself, absorbed in herself, had made the strain . . . had made everybody feel that their nerves were stretched to breaking-point. Alice who could see no point of view except her own . . . introspective and selfish, always thinking about the impression she was making on people. Oh, bother Alice . . . she was gone . . . and peace had flowed in to fill her place. And the Old Man . . . No, the Old Man would not utterly change . . . it was wise that they should have separate houses . . . but without Alice, the Old Man would be dif-

ferent . . . not so driven . . . so hag-ridden . . . Pity clouded her eyes . . . He would build up again the defences that had been torn down . . . but there would be no need now for such iron barriers. There was a shyness . . . an embarrassment with him now . . . but it would pass. . . . And Charles . . . She smiled a little. One didn't think about him . . . one just felt. . . .

Out there on the rise, among the mimosa trees, was a marvellous place for a house. The sun was dropping down into the west . . . soon the veldt would be stained with purple shadows. Down by the paddocks the cattle were lowing . . . it came to Davida like a beloved sound. The sky was a deep, transparent blue . . . one could almost see the stars . . . pale still while the sun lingered. Davida groped among her thoughts, trying to find her real, plain reason for staying . . . and shirked it, calling it sentiment. She baulked at the crystallizing conviction that there was no point in life, unless you held by something more than just material facts . . . that reason must give way before the faint stirrings of the spirit . . . that something . . . some instinct transcended finite thought. . . .

"In fact . . ." she thought and laughed, "I might as well admit . . . that I've more or less got religion in spite of myself. . . ."

"A sort of religion . . ." she added.

Betty and Mallin came up from the stables.

"The sun is down . . ." said Davida, judicially . . .  
"you'll find the whisky in the sitting-room, Mallie!"



## V I

That evening they drove down in Betty's car to the wheat "lands."

"Why did he shave his beard off?" murmured Davida.

Charles chuckled (all day they had laughed at the least thing). "Well, after he had burnt Alice's clothes, apparently he felt the whole atmosphere was so much fresher, that he thought he'd get rid of his beard and start a new life. He only grew it, I believe, as a sort of camouflage . . . they're good things to hide behind. By the way . . . he's given Alice an allowance and sent his solicitor to tell her it's hers for life so long as she doesn't want to visit us. But I should imagine that's the last thing she'd ever want to do." He hesitated, "I don't promise perfection, Davida . . . but we'll make a go of it this time. . . ."

The baboon was sitting on the kopje. He yawped angrily at them, recognizing in Charles his old enemy.

They blew the hooter at him.

THE END









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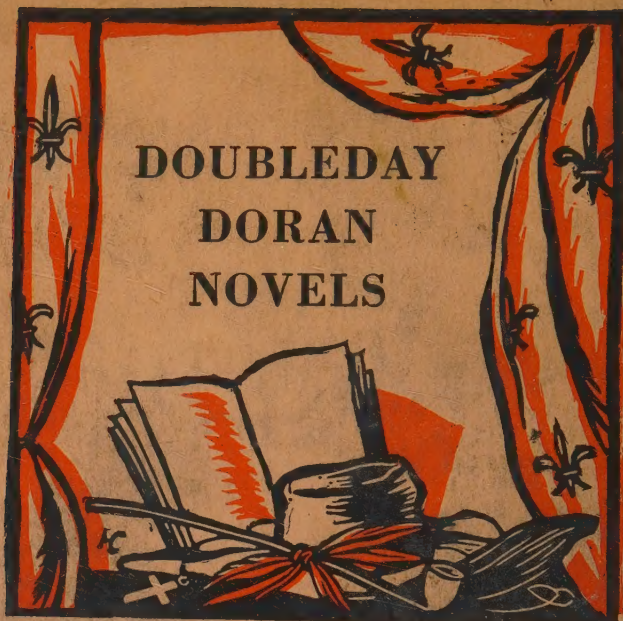
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